

SIMULACRUM

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration. It features a man in a light-colored suit and a dark bow tie standing in the center. The setting appears to be a cavern or a dark, overgrown space with gnarled, tree-like roots or structures hanging from above. A bat-like creature is visible in the upper right corner, and a skull is partially visible in the lower left corner. The overall color palette is dark with shades of blue, green, and black.

THE MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE TRANSFORMATION

The Lovecraft Issue

RAMSEY CAMPBELL, RICHARD KUNZMANN,
POPPY Z. BRITE, DAVE CARSON

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THE EDITOR'S DESK

I knew it was coming—and so did probably many of you. Ever since I wrote that introductory letter in 2003, I knew I wanted to do an issue dedicated to Howard Phillips Lovecraft. (August 20, 1890 - March 15, 1937)

Born in Providence, Rhode Island, Lovecraft was an underrated writer who never attained the fame that he would posthumously. His work has been published in over 500 books, in at least 17 languages.

A perfectionist, Lovecraft wrote in longhand and in a style that is today instantly recognizable. He made frequent use of archaic adjectives, and in some instances there is an almost journalistic essence to his stories that made them all the more believable ... All the more terrifying.

Many of his contemporary fans are unaware of the fact that Lovecraft's first love was poetry. For those of you who haven't read that part of his canon, I highly recommend that you do so.

It's difficult to choose my favorites among Lovecraft's work. (I was, however seriously reminded of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* when I woke up to yet another morning of rain in a cycle that's been going on for three weeks here in Invercargill, New Zealand. Grey skies, grayer rain, cold winds, weather-beaten cabin-homes ... And boy, do people here love to fish ...) Choosing a favorite would simply be an exercise in neglect, even choosing more than one. What I can say is that his stories have stayed with me ever since I've read them. That I can re-read them and still be scared witless. They have the uncanny knack of wrapping themselves into your subconscious no matter where it finds itself at a particular time in your life. And they come back to haunt you when you least expect it, a little bit of cosmic foresight in what we deem to be an essentially mundane life. Not so. Lovecraft makes us realize this.

Aspiring writers take note: Everyone and their uncle who writes weird fiction, horror, and anything horror-ish has cited Lovecraft as an influence on their work, including such relatively well-known people as Stephen King and Clive Barker. You'll do yourself a favor to get your hands on a collection of his work if you haven't already done so. Read. Write. Read some more. Revise. Write. Read. You know the rhyme.

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So here we go. Close the curtains, bar the doors, light a purple candle. And if something starts scratching at the back door don't worry. We all knew they were going to come back some time ...

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The Crucial Lovecraft

Ramsey Campbell

The fathers of the modern horror story are Poe in America and Le Fanu in Britain, both of whom refined Gothic methods to produce some of the greatest short stories in the field. Nor should Hoffman's psychological fantasies be overlooked. If I take Lovecraft to be the most important single writer of the weird, it's because he unites the traditions that preceded him on both sides of the Atlantic and builds on their strengths. His *Supernatural Horror in Literature* is not only an appreciation of all that he found best in the genre and a critique of the flaws he saw, but also a statement of his own artistic ambitions. His fiction gives them life.

To an extent his reputation is the victim of his most famous creation, the Lovecraft Mythos. It was conceived as an antidote to conventional Victorian occultism—as an attempt to reclaim the imaginative appeal of the unknown—and is only one of many ways his tales suggest worse, or greater, than they show. It is also just one of his means of reaching for a sense of wonder, the aim that produces the visionary horror of his finest work (by no means all of it belonging to the Mythos). His stories represent a search for the perfect form for the weird tale, a process in which he tried out all the forms and all the styles of prose he could.

Nevertheless the Mythos is his most visible bequest to the field, because it looks so easy to imitate or draw upon. As one of the first writers to copy Lovecraft without having known him, I must take some of the blame for the way his concept has been rendered over-explicit and over-explained, precisely the reverse of his intentions. Luckily his influence is far more profound. In his essays and letters he was able to preserve the notion of horror fiction as literature despite all the assaults pulp writing had made on its best qualities, a view that was especially fruitful in the case of Fritz Leiber, who followed his mentor's example of uniting the Transatlantic traditions. Other correspondents such as Robert Bloch, Donald Wandrei and Henry Kuttner assimilated his vision into their own. More recently such diverse talents as T. E. D. Klein, Thomas Ligotti and Poppy Z. Brite have acknowledged Lovecraft's importance to their work,

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but who could accuse any of them of simple mimicry? His use of suggestion and allusion might seem beyond the reach of most filmmakers, but I submit *The Blair Witch Project* as the most Lovecraftian of films, not least in the documentary realism he urged upon serious artists in the field and in the inexplicitness with which it conveys, to use his phrase, dread suspense.

Yet Lovecraft's achievement lies not so much in his influence as in the enduring qualities of his finest work. Who can forget the cellars of Joseph Curwen, the alien color, the grotto beneath Exham Priory, the mountain that walked or stumbled, the graveyard above the tower, the handwriting out of time and so much else? "I must be very deliberate now, and choose my words." He did, and more of his successors should. The field would be all the richer if more writers learned from both his care for structure and his larger principles. His yearning for the cosmic is the greatest strength of his best tales. He is one of the few masters of the tale of terror that reaches for, and often attains, awe.

THE END

The *Oxford Companion to English Literature* describes Ramsey Campbell as "Britain's most respected living horror writer". He has been given more awards than any other writer in the field, including the Grand Master Award of the World Horror Convention and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Horror Writers Association. Among his novels are *The Face That Must Die*, *Incarnate*, *Midnight Sun*, *The Count of Eleven*, *Silent Children*, *The Darkest Part of the Woods*, *The Overnight*, and *Secret Stories*. Forthcoming are *The Communications* and *Spanked by Nuns*. His collections include *Waking Nightmares*, *Alone with the Horrors*, *Ghosts and Grisly Things* and *Told by the Dead*, and his non-fiction is collected as *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*. His novels *The Nameless* and *Pact of the Fathers* have been filmed in Spain. Ramsey Campbell lives on Merseyside with his wife Jenny. He reviews films and DVDs weekly for BBC Radio Merseyside. His pleasures include classical music, good food and wine, and whatever's in that pipe. His web site is at www.ramseycampbell.com

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Pillars Of Stone

Richard Kunzmann

There is something about the pseudo-scientific nature of Lovecraft's style that gives it Darwinian timelessness. There is nothing openly scary about his stories, nothing incredibly daring about his style; often his narrative may seem tedious, and his characters two-dimensional. And yet, throughout his canon, Lovecraft has invented stories that reek of imaginative genius and charming creepiness, which I find irresistible. Though I adore his Dream Cycle stories, *The Dunwich Horror*, *At the Mountains of Madness*, and the *Shadow out of Time*, the stories inspired by his work are often as enjoyable. I hang on to my Lovecraft collection like one of his obsessive mad scientists, and they are some of the few books I reread time and time again. The Pillars of Stone was mostly inspired by *The Call of Cthulhu*. There are often presences in Lovecraft's stories lurking deep underground, waiting to resurface, and I wondered what might happen should present-day scientists discover traces of the Ancient Ones, the deeper and deeper we mine and drill. This is my answer and my homage to the greatest pioneer of horror.

Interview with Dr Gillen Chambers, E.E Rutherford Asylum, Arkham, March 2002

Note: I still cannot speak of the illustrious geologist as a subject, nor a patient, with whom I attempted to conduct a number of interviews. Though he has been reduced to the level of an imbecile, and is severely incapacitated by long periods of catatonia, the time I have spent with him has convinced me that some intelligence must still exist deep within the pall of horrible memories that restrain this man from speaking. We have never met as contemporaries, but he has nevertheless been as a mentor to me. Throughout the years I have closely followed his multidisciplinary research on unusual rock formations and geometries in the architectures of ancient cultures.

"Dr Chambers, this is Dr Roland Wescott. Do you know who I am?"

"Who I am," he said, his voice as hollow as an echo in a cavern.

"I understand this may be difficult—"

"Difficult."

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"But could you tell me what happened on your trip to South Africa?"

"Africa." The man sat silently in his single chair, his open hospital gown revealing his chest, stomach, and some of his genitalia. I dared not cover him up, since previous attempts resulted in violent outbursts. On the last occasion, the principal of the institution warned me not to agitate the elderly academic any more otherwise my visitation rights would be terminated.

"Your journals indicate Anglo American mines requested your presence at one of their goldfields in Carltonville; in fact, at the deepest mine in the world. Am I correct?"

His vacant expression did not change. "Correct."

I sighed. "Am I correct, or are you just repeating what I just said."

"Correct, said."

This line of conversation had continued for the past year. The man was unable to illuminate the gaps in his journals, nor was he able to tell of any aspect of what must be the most remarkable tale in recent geological history. Of course I had contacted both Anglo American's regional and international offices, but to say I was stonewalled would be a euphemism. Their only statement comes in the form of a press release: there had been a terrible accident 26 February 2001, in which three company engineers and four sub-contracted specialists were killed. Only Doctor Gillen Chambers survived. Further inquires on my part within the scientific community concerned with this singular branch of science, revealed that the specialists in question included a second geologist, a paleontologist, an archaeologist, and two men who seemed to have no scientific background but who shared one commonality: freemasonry.

I was growing desperate. Some impossible artifacts had been discovered at depths hereto worth unknown to mankind, in a part of the world where the oldest remains of humans have also been found. I had to know.

Amongst Dr Chambers's extensive papers, notes, and journals, I found a strange black and white picture. His wife had not seen it before and allowed me to take it home. This image, which seemed to show nothing more than an overexposed vaulted arch of some kind, white speckles like dust particles on the lens, and a vast darkness beyond, I had smuggled into

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Rutherford. I took it from the docket on my lap, and held it up for the man to see.

"What is this; where was it taken?"

His reaction was extraordinary. Chambers suddenly screamed and flung himself backward, as if I was about to prod him with a white-hot brand. He fell from his chair and crawled hurriedly towards the furthest corner of the whitewashed room.

I leaped to my feet. "Doctor, you understand. You *remember*. Tell me! Tell me what it is, what happened to you."

He was clawing the masonry as if to dig his way out of this room, this very building, only to escape the image and me.

The door behind me was flung open. In came three heavysset orderlies and the director of the asylum. I was ordered out, never to return.

Interview with William E. Grant, at home, London, August 2002

Note: The conversation with Mr Grant proved more relaxed and desirous than any I had with Doctor Chambers, though its implications are more mystifying than enlightening. I have resolved to follow up his claims with an expedition of my own.

"I remember that day well, my friend. How can I forget it? I'd been tunnelling round London all me life, constructin' new lines for the tubes, and I'd seen nothin' like it before, nothin' like it since. Aw-right, I quit the work soon afterward, but I kept me ear to the ground, if you know what I mean. Nothin' like it since, I tell you, but I'm sure there are more of them things in this world.

I remember ol' Gawain was complainin' that day 'bout somethin' his mate Henry saw in a storm sewer. Can't quite remember what he was talkin' about—kinda switched off when Gawain was talkin'—but I remember him sayin' somethin' like, 'there ain't no such thing as—'. You couldn't hear much on that site, what with all them heavy machinery, but that line just stuck in me head.

We was sittin' in the tunnel a little away from the excavations for the extension of the Central Line past Stratford, going further north-east. We was 'avin' our tea when the shriekin' started. First we didn't look up, 'cause

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it was commonplace for the digger's blades to hit some buried rock every now and again. It was dark, bright white 'alogens glowing 'ere and there, concentrated on the spots where men worked. Patchy shadows everywhere sometimes looked like they was movin'. The air was cool and it felt fresh, despite us bein' underground. I like the smell of earth getting' worked; I should've been a farmer, not a mole.

Gawain was sayin' somethin' like, 'So he says to me, don't you believe me? I says, no, 'ow can I, guv? Says Henry, is truth, the bloody thing came out of—' That's when it 'appened, you see. The digger's rotatin' blades screamed like banshees. We grabbed our ears, droppin' our cups of coffee. There was the smell of ozone, motors burnin' out as the digger's blades where first resisted, then bent and twisted. There was a clatter of machinery breakin', a sound of a lobster bein' broken open with a nutcracker. Shouts went up and people came runnin' past. We couldn't afford to lose the machine, we was behind schedule already.

'Fuck they done now, man?' asked Gawain. 'Oi!' His call was absorbed by the noise and the tunnel walls. I remember sometimes thinking them soft walls reminded me off bein' inside fleshy veins of something alive, like we was bugs in mother Earth's blood, or somethin'. 'They *know* they shouldn't be cuttin' the hard stuff with that machine', said Gawain.

He was right, they weren't supposed to, but I'd taken seismic readin's that mornin'. There wasn't supposed to be nothin' harder than sandstone. The digger's headlights threw an orange halo all round the tunnel. It was worse than we thought. It had tilted forward, its tracks 'n tail right up in the air like a whore's arse. We couldn't immediately reverse it and see beyond the giant drill-bit what we'd hit, but some of the rock that had been thrown clear was pure black granite.

Now anyone that knows London, knows how muddy things are here, and there certainly ain't no granite that occurs naturally. It's somethin' them Romans brought with them, along with their civilisation and their gods. They tamed the barbarians and tamed the land; they drilled wells for water, built aqueducts, temples, and what not. When you're diggin' six hundred feet underground you sometimes find things: pottery, rusty weapons, buildin' blocks; I even seen a pure silver tray come out once—nothin' strange in that. Every now and again we've even hit a well lined

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with granite. You can't pick 'em up with seismic equipment unless you're bloody lucky, but they cause havoc with construction plannin'.

We finally got that digger out, and Gav and I scrambled up the heap of fallen rock to take a better look. There it was: this well, 'bout ten feet in diameter, lined with large blocks of granite, black as night. Romans must have carted it in from God knows where. We shone our torches up and down, but the beams weren't strong enough, just dust particles swirling in the light. It hadn't collapsed in thousands of years. Funny thing that, 'cause usually they've filled up somewhere along the years. Gav picked up a sizable rock and tossed it over the edge. We listened. Nothin'. Bloody nothin', like it fell all the way through to China. One of the engineers told me I'm full of hogwash when I told him this, and used one of them distancing lasers. Didn't pick up anythin', either. That little red dot of his disappeared like a needle in a haystack. Seen nothin' like it ever since, heard nothin' either."

Personal Journal, at home, Boston, November 2002

I am upset. My study is littered with documents of various sorts, and books that have illuminated the trail a sane Doctor Chambers left before retreating from this world. I have been obsessing over this work for two years now. These are the words my wife has just used before hurling my cold meal at me before slamming the door shut behind herself.

Am I obsessed?

She does not seem to understand the meaning of dedication, of sacrifice. Julie has never needed to work; I have always provided for us, even while I was still a student in Providence. She is naïve about the world and its complexities, its mysteries that must be unraveled for the good of science and mankind. I try to forgive these lapses, but it grows harder with every confrontation.

She has called me a stony heartless recluse and threatened divorce, an entirely unnecessary threat, for where would she go, and who would take care of her? She is convinced that I am a harder man than she initially thought, because no amount of love and sensitivity has softened me up. What harsh words she speaks? Are they in themselves not heartless?

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For a moment I stood up and pushed aside the curtains of the study's small bay window. At eleven o' clock the suburban street is empty, large flakes of snow drifting aimlessly in the night, or swarming around the streetlights like thousands of frozen moths. It is a lonely hour in a forlorn world, and all living things seem dead and buried.

I cannot procrastinate any longer. From what I can gather, Doctor Chambers's notes hint at some coming calamity as we push the envelope of the discovered world, and rediscover artifacts of an antediluvian world perhaps better left entombed. I sense urgency in his writings, and the fatal occurrences in South Africa seem to confirm this.

Transcript of a Telephone Conversation with "Hendrik Meyer", Chief Mining Engineer, Carltonville, February 2003

Note: I had been in South Africa for three months, trying to make contact with the miners who either discovered the underground ruins or the delirious Dr Chambers, wondering aimlessly in the mines. I was surprised when Mr Meyer contacted me the night before I was to leave for Boston, utterly disappointed in my venture. Even though he called me up, he was still hesitant to speak. He required all sorts of guarantees of anonymity before he began to speak in a gruff and heavily accented voice.

"They had placed explosives while digging for what we thought might be a rich vein of gold. When the dust cleared there wasn't just rubble. A black hole had appeared at the end of the tunnel, a cave or hollow at over a thousand meters below ground—impossible at those kinds of pressures. The black miners who were onsite took one sniff at the air coming out of that cavern and ran. Dropped everything and sprinted for the lifts in a blind panic. Turns out they had their own legends about subterranean gods and demons, stories that have been handed down from shaman to shaman amongst the Nguni tribes. God damn it. Even after what happened to the expedition we couldn't get any of them down there to help seal the shaft."

'I was one of the first senior personnel down there. The entire level was empty of workers; even the whites had refused to continue work after hearing the stories from their fellow workers. We were a team of six, and

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the only sound was of air-conditioners cooling the air and water dripping from the tunnel walls. It took about an hour from the central shaft to the outermost tunnels where the cavern had been discovered. Long before we reached that point we could smell the foulest air permeating the tunnel. At first we thought it might be hydrogen sulphide, a poisonous gas sometimes discovered at those depths near volcanoes, but it wasn't just a stink of brimstone, it was something far worse.

"I immediately noticed that the rock nearest to the cavern was not anything similar to the stone surrounding it. It was not hewn rock, but it was not anything I or the company geologist that was with me had seen before either. It was black with a strange glassiness similar to igneous rock. It should never have been there; I've mined in that area for over twenty years, and never seen anything like it.

I shone my torch through a gap wide enough for three men to squeeze through, side by side. It was like using a penlight in a dark desert. The beam of light was completely absorbed by the darkness. Here the stench was overpowering.

I ordered a more powerful source of light to be brought down, something with a few kilowatts of power and needing a generator. We set it up at the mouth of the cave and switched it on.

The beam shot out reaching and reaching into the darkness until finally it hit upon a structure in the distance. I ... I can't begin to describe it to you. It looked manmade, but the scale ... it defied logic, it goes against everything we know about geology, about the physics of pressure.

At a distance of about seven hundred feet there was illuminated a section similar to that found in Roman Catholic cathedrals. Illuminated was the tiniest area of a fanned vault, which must have stretched on for hundreds of feet, propping up untold tons of solid rock. We must have broken through in the middle of a wall, for shining our beam of light downward, I saw only the sheer surface of that strange obsidian rock reaching down into an abyss. This was a monstrous chamber propping up the earth as if it were just a ceiling.

Seeing something like that, trying to get the scale of that place into your head, it does something to you. We were badly shaken by what we'd seen. The stench of the place, and its gargantuan size made us instinctively

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want be rid of it. Like the miners who had known from the first that something was wrong, we wanted out, but we had to report what we'd seen to our superiors—after all they'd sent us down there to discover the reason for the work stoppage that was losing the company millions of rands a day. When they heard what we had to say, I realized it was a mistake to convey to them what we'd found. Immediately they wanted the world's experts to establish what was in that place and, perhaps more importantly, to discover the kind of technology that rendered such underground architecture possible. The applications in mining would be endless, you see."

There was a long pause, before the man exhaled a shuddering sigh. "That's it. It's all I can tell you from experience. I never went down that shaft again."

"But what happened next?" I prompted.

"You should talk to someone else about that."

"No wai—"

There was a click as the man replaced the receiver. Since then, I have discovered that there was, and is, neither a Hendrick Meyer in Anglo American's employment, nor a chief mining engineer with a similar name. It is, therefore, impossible to verify the man's claims, although they easily correspond with certain myths and legends gleaned from ancient texts discovered at the mountain fortress of Alamut, and in deep caverns below Petra, all of them accumulated by Doctor Chambers at the Miskatonic library in Arkham. Cross-references and notes in the ancient *Pnakotic Manuscripts* and *Sagas of the Shoggoeans* describe the cyclical lives of the Ancient Ones, their powers in flux with the universe, waxing and waning, first ascending in the world as reincarnations of their cyclopean forms, then descending into a world of darkness, to wonder vast hauls of stone and await their summons at the hands of devotees once more.

One can only wonder whether the urgency in the Doctor's notes reflects his fears that our explorations may prematurely awaken the Ancient Ones.

Letter addressed to Roland Wescott, Boston, February 2003

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Dear Roland,

When you are not at home I slip into your study to smell your chair, to touch your things—your books, pens, handwritten notes—and imagine you sitting there, so predictably studious. I come here to watch a more pleasant memory, even fantasy, of you, because I am alone. I sit in a corner amongst the countless books stacked everywhere, and observe you at your desk, only to wonder what happened to us. It's the only time I go into your room because I know it piques you when I otherwise disturb you. When I am alone in your study with some other Roland Wescott, I see you look over your shoulder and smile at me. This cheers me, because it's the only time you take an interest in me.

You get up from your creaky chair and approach. A shiver of excitement runs through my body, because your eyes have a softness and warmth I have never before known in you. But with each of that Roland's steps, this image of you always decays. Your eyes become bloodshot with lack of sleep; blue bags hang under them. Your skin becomes as gray as the color of gargoyles on church buttresses; you smell unwashed. When you lay your hand on my face I seem to hear you screaming from some far away place, and your hand ... it is cold as stone.

I cannot stand this sort of life anymore. I married you in happier times, and I was prepared to suffer some neglect as you built up your career. I've always known how important your work is, but nothing prepared me for the merciless, self-absorbed son of a bitch you've become. I wish it were different; I wish you would realize what you are doing to yourself, and what you've done to me, but you are so absorbed in your work on obscure scripts, filthy cults and tribes, and those stupid rocks and architectural designs of yours, I fear you'll never know life has past you by, until it is too late.

Goodbye Roland,
Julie

Personal Journal, Paris, March 2003

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Oh, Julie. If only you knew more about the forces threatening this world, you surely would not have been so rashly left me. My work has been fevered, yes, but justifiably so. Your word 'obsessed' may be a good word to use in my case, but it implies some neurosis, and I know that I am far from insane, though I cannot say the same about this world we have fashioned, without angels and demons and gods. Science and logic and rationality have thus far been our greatest achievements, but I am now quickly discovering their limits. They are, after all, only human mnemonic and heuristic tricks forcing an unknowable world into knowable constraints of our own design. From Doctor Chamber's notes and these ancient texts so graciously copied or lent to me by Miskatonic, I gather that we as a species neither possess the language, nor the faculties, to describe the immensity and complexity of these beings we have stumbled upon, perhaps awoken.

I have had a breakthrough, dear Julie. A telephone call in the middle of the night has led me to Paris to meet a man whose identity remains shrouded in mystery. His accent is British, though his voice is singular in its resonance. When he speaks it does not sound human, but seems to echo with a noise of thousands of bees buzzing and communicating. I know not whether he is a friend or a foe, only that he can tell me more about the occurrences in the depths of that mine in South Africa.

I am again staring at that photograph, Julie, the last remnant of Doctor Chamber's knapsack he carried into that black void at the center of the earth. The contrast between an overexposed, white foreground, and the unfathomable black background disturbs me, because it surely is some record of an imminent danger, but also utterly useless, like a blind man's description of a murderer.

Interview with Adam Weishaupt, Freemasons, Paris March 2003

Note: Badly shaken. I do not know to whom I can turn. Where are you, Julie? I fear my enquiries have roused the suspicion and interest of parties whose powers and influence extend beyond the scope of a mere academic. Whom have I affronted, who are my allies? Which way am I being pushed, and for what? There was something about this man, Julie, something I

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hope to never experience again. Did Doctor Chambers convene with him at some point? I don't know; I just don't know.

"Who am I?" repeated the man after me. He was sitting at a giant desk of dark mahogany. "Surely you should by now know better than to ask me that, Doctor Wescott. I am who I am, and I have many names. Names are keys, Doctor Wescott, and I do not believe you deserve to add mine to your bundle. But you may call me Adam Weishaupt, of the Freemasons."

He looked both young and impossibly old. His hair was a strange silver colour, his white beard cut in the fashion of Charles Darwin's era, his black swallowtail suit out of place and time. The buzz in his voice resounded with strange energies, as if he were communicating with me on different levels, while his eyes were the blackest orbs I have ever seen in a man's face.

"I have called you to Paris because you are following in the footsteps of Doctor Chambers, a man of extraordinary vision who has met with an unfortunate fate."

"You know what happened?" I gasped like an eager boy gossiping behind the bicycle shed.

The man stood and poured himself a cognac from a crystal decanter on the edge of his desk. With one hand clasped in the small of his back, he turned to consider the nightscape of Paris. From where I was sitting, I could see the glowing pyramid in front of the Louvre on the far side of the dark *Jardin des Tuileries*.

"There are some aspects I am prepared to share with you, others I will keep to myself," he says with his back to me.

"We are of an ancient order, as you well know—older than the free mason guilds established in the middle ages to unify stoneworkers on Roman Catholic building sites, older than the engineers who knew how to bring about the fall of Jericho's walls, and more ancient than the architects of the pyramids. Our order's origins lie at the very beginning of time, when gods passed unto humans the skills to shape stone, and the knowledge of fire.

Divine inspiration has always been the greatest teacher, and the skills first given us by long forgotten deities were unmatched. The eons since have only seen an erosion of those abilities. What are skyscrapers

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compared to the Mayan temples, built without mortar? What are giant shopping malls that crumble after forty years in comparison to the pyramids, which have stood for thousands of years? Doctor Wescott, we were given divine skills to fashion rock and build structures in the service of beings beyond our comprehension. The question you must ask yourself about the vaults found in South Africa should not be how come they exist, but what they exist for."

"They imprison the Ancient Ones," I answered quickly, eager to please. 'Cuthulu, Nyarlathotep, Yog-Sothoth, Shub-Niggurath—"

"Oh, stop it with your banal recital!" Mr Weishaupt turned around, waving an annoyed hand in my direction. "It is crass in light of what you already know."

I considered his restrained outburst. Once more my thoughts turned to the clay tablets held by the Chanikuwa of the Gobi desert. Cyclical depictions of the birth and death of man and his gods are not uncommon. Scientific and philosophical establishments have argued this past century that highly evolved cultures like the Incas and the Egyptians did not have sciences per se, precisely because they thought of the world in a cyclical way, without ever understanding causality, a linear approach we now favour. But what if it was true? What if this world and the universe die and are reborn, time and again? What if historical events are set to occur, over and over? I have often wondered whether there is an analogy between those edifices of stone, the destruction of Babylon and the twin towers in New York City?

Mr Weishaupt smiled at me as he placed his glass on the table. "It seems something is dawning on you, Doctor, and by my estimates you are on the right track. You see, as Masons we did not start out as builders. One can say we started out as facilitators, as the hands of gods."

I leaped to my feet. "Are you saying you wish to unleash the Great Old Ones?"

"Good God, no!"

"Then why your interest, as *facilitators*, in those subterranean structures?"

"Academic, as yours."

"I'm not convinced."

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"Calm down, Doctor Wescott. I believe that at some point, in bygone days, freemasons facilitated the building of those caverns, however daunting the task may now seem."

At this point I laughed. I am ashamed to say it sounded hysterical, mad even. To think that humans may have aided in the design of structures as cyclopean as Mr Meyer described indeed seemed ludicrous.

"Mr Weishaupt," I said. "I have another theory. It may well be that the freemasons are trying to associate themselves with every mystery and conspiracy this strange world holds. You want to gather every secret to yourselves like children hoarding sweets. This matter is larger than that, Mr Weishaupt, bigger than you and your little club. I bid you a goodnight."

As I reached the door and began turning the brass knob, it seemed as though the lights suddenly dimmed behind me. An icy draught assailed my back, and I became terrified for some unknown reason.

"Don't be a fool, boy," said a voice behind me, which now more than ever resembled that noise of swarming bees. "Do not interfere with the way of the universe. Allow it to run its course, no matter what the consequences."

I took a deep breath. "Our discovery of those halls was accidental. It has nothing to do with fate, or destiny, nor with the universe's cycles. If we have disturbed the Great Old Ones, it is up to us to make sure they remain at rest, until it is their time once more." With that, I quickly opened the door and stepped into the corridor of a Parisian hotel, the name of which I cannot remember, but which I blessed with all my heart for still being there.

Personal Journal, at home, Boston July 2003

I have not been able to enjoy this fine summer, because you are not here to bring its warmth into this cold house. Julie, you were most certainly named after July, or some goddess that inspired the name. Blossoms blow down the streets as snowflakes blew all around when you left three months ago. Where are you Julie?

I cannot sleep. Every crack of floorboards, every shadow passing by our windows, rouses me. I cannot bare the silence of this abandoned

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apartment anymore, and I cannot bare to re-examine the research I have accumulated all these years. It feels like someone wants me dead and I know an assassin is coming, but then I wonder what does it matter? Our race and planet will be wiped out anyway, not by some cosmic calamity like a dying sun, but by malevolent beings, resting listlessly in the bowels of this very planet, in halls beneath vaults of our own making, if Weishaupt is to be believed.

Is it true, I wonder? This research—these notes and books and papers, this one vague image—is it nothing more than hearsay, tabloid garbage dressed up as scientific proof? What *is* scientific proof?

I think you were right Julie: I *am* obsessing. I am slowly losing my mind.

There is only one way I can cleanse myself of this scourge and be free once more to love you as you deserved to be loved. I must resolve this issue once and for all. I will contact Mr. William E. Grant and negotiate access to the London well that plunges deep into the earth. I am convinced it must be one route to the caverns of the Great Old Ones.

Personal Journal, London, August 27, 2003, 15: 37

This may be my last journal entry. In about five minutes I will descend down this shaft at the end of an abandoned Circle Line extension to discover my own fate, and that of humankind. I will leave this notebook here in the hope that someone will find it if I am to die, although I will progress from this point onward with a Dictaphone.

I have paid a brave French mountaineer Jacques Seurat a sizeable retainer to aid me in my quest. Where I feel only terror, he seems to be leaping from his skin with excitement. We are here without the knowledge of the London Underground or any other parties, except, perhaps, for Mr Grant, and may well disappear without anyone ever knowing what has happened to us. Our preparations have been in secret; I could not risk another run-in with someone like Weishaupt.

Jacques has assembled a bracket with a motorised pulley system that will lower us down the well. I only hope that we have enough rope to reach

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the bottom of the well, and that the motor of this system of his can hoist us fast enough should we need to escape in a hurry.

God, I am so scared Julie. I know now what I've been missing, and what you've been trying to tell me all these months. I love you, and miss you. Until we meet again.

TRANSCRIPT

Session: 18, Case Number: 2134

Date: 27 January 2004

Name: Roland. Surname Unknown

Age: approx 35

Classified: Catatonic Schizophrenia

Indications: Catalepsy, Alogia, Avolition and Echolalia

Medication: Clozapine/Prozac

"Roland, can you hear me, love?"

"Hear you."

"We're going to try work through what happened to you again, OK?"

"OK."

"Right. I've got this back from the police; it's the Dictaphone they found with you. Can we listen to it?"

"To it."

"Is that a 'do it'? "

"Do it."

"Roland, I'm going to need more from you than an echo."

"Echo. Echo. Echoes in big places."

"That's good, Roland. Keep going, you're doing fine. You know, it's a funny thing you should mention echoes in big places, 'cause that's what you're talking about on your little recorder here."

"That's what I'm talking about."

"I'm going to switch this on, and we'll listen to it. You tell me when to stop."

"Stop."

"Not now, silly; let me switch it on first."

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"Stop."

"I'm going to turn this on unless you object."

"Object."

"Goodness. Just ... here goes."

"[COUGHING] finally clear of chimney, or well, whatever it is. This is the worst part. We two are dangling from a single rope, surrounded by a darkness that seems tangible. Our lights are not strong enough to pierce it, and our ears long ago lost any trace of our motorized winch. It feels like we're trapped deep underwater, at night and at sea, with no illumination. The air is damp and there's a horrible stench by any standards. I must apologize for not expressing myself clearly and concisely, but this event is extraordinary and I'm not used to dictating notes.

"By the depth and rate of our descent I should hazard a guess that we'll need to decompress when we eventually come back up, I—"

"Stop."

"Nothing's happened yet, Roland. Why stop here?"

"STOP!"

"Roland, we need to listen to this. You're talking about a Julie on here. Who's Julie?"

[SUBJECT BEGINS TO MOAN, ROCKING HIMSELF] "Julie. *Julieeee.*"

"Maybe we shouldn't be pushing him this hard, Clare."

"Jesus, Brian, we've made no progress with him, whatsoever. We don't know who he is and he has no record of NHS insurance. They're going to turn him out in a week's time. It's worth finding out who this Julie is, and if she's still alive. The same with this Jacques."

"JULIE!"

"Switch it back on, then"

"...Oh my God! There's a floor. You see that Jacques? There's a fucking floor. I feel like we've been saved. An oasis, that's what it is."

"Who's Jacques, Roland?"

[SCREAMS. SUBJECT PULLS AT EARS, CLOSES EYES, VIOLENTLY SHAKES HEAD]

"...intricate designs reminding me of Moslem architecture. Strange images of ... flora, patterned plants of some kind, I believe. See those pillars, Jacques. Pillars of Stone. How many? How far must they stretch,

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how strong must these vaults be to prop up the world? Colors are indistinct. God, those angles, geometries."

[MORE SCREAMS FROM SUBJECT. GAGS]

"Clare!"

"Who's Jacques, Roland? What happened to him? Where did you go?"

"*Julie!* I want Julie."

"...WAIT! Wait, stop the descent. Did you hear that? What was that? No, I didn't hear that. There was something. I don't know, man; you wanna go up or down, doc? No, wait here for a minute. STOP! Shine there. What was that? [GARBLED EMISSIONS, THEN ONE FAST RECEDING SCREAM]"

[SUBJECT CHOKES, VOMITS, ONSET OF RECURRING EPILEPTIC FIT]

"Jesus, Clare, look what you've done."

"Medication, quick!"

"Too late, Clare, he's turned to stone again."

Report: The Case of Dr Gillen Chambers, E.E Rutherford Asylum, Arkham, April 2004 Dr Phinias Crompton

The causes of the affliction that have plagued Dr Chambers the last three years are still not known, and so, too, is the cause of the medical disease which finally took his life during the night of April 14, 2004. No known syndrome exists that adequately describes the transformed state in which we found the doctor, though the growing severity of his catatonia may have been, in hindsight, a strange precursor to his ultimate demise.

The patient's increased rigidity and disassociation with the world of men ran concurrently with a gradual drop in body temperature, and peculiar hardening of the skin. At first it was believed that this sickness may have been linked to changes in his metabolism, but all test up to and including April 14, 2004 showed this to be erroneous.

The answer is both simple and unimaginably complex. On the morning of April 15, 2004, Nurses Whittaker and Lopez arrived to feed the patient at 7.15 am. They found the patient as inert as always. Nothing seemed

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strange until they touched him. The skin was as cold as stone, and had a rough texture, which the two orderlies could not remember from previous occasions. The patient's face was also frozen in a horrible grimace that must have spoken of the terrible things he had witnessed, and perhaps relived in his last moments. His outstretched hands were frozen in the form of talons, though the rest of his body had fixated in a fetal position.

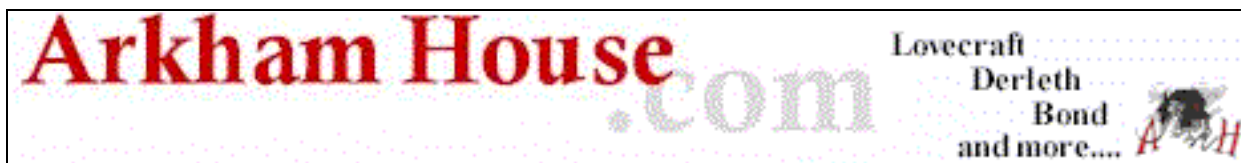
The overall impression I had of Dr Chambers upon my arrival in Room 23 (and please refer to enclosed photographs for confirmation) is that of gargoyles protecting the spires and buttresses of cathedrals.

Indeed, for all intents and purposes, the patient gradually turned to stone under our noses, and we can only hope that other such cases can be located nationally and internationally, so that this new phenomenon can be confirmed and studied.

THE END

Richard Kunzmann writes crime in order to hide far away from the real world. His first book *The Bloody Harvests*, published by Macmillan UK, has been well-received, which led to him gallivanting across South Africa, Namibia and the UK—a very happy occasion for a macabre soul. On occasion he has also been enticed to write for various South African magazines, newspapers, and international speculative fiction publications, but in the end he prefers to follow his feet towards the closest horizon. A small library of his is stashed somewhere south of the Tropic of Capricorn. His second book is due out in 2005.

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The Black Violin

James I. Wasserman

What inspired me to write this piece was the curiosity behind those elite clubs that people seem to know about, what lurks behind those closed doors to places we aren't allowed normally to visit but hear so much about under the sheath of word of mouth or gossip. What's really behind those oft-talked about but rarely seen doors, and who are those people that know about them? What happens under the dark of night when a select few are inside these elite gatherings? A friend of mine who inspired me to write this story made the observation of the pretension of some exclusive clubs with their trendy music and fashion and people garbed so eloquently but for what? To dance in silence, with some unknown understanding that they are better in the rest? Who are they and what do they procure?

It all started quite innocently, as one would imagine.

I consider myself to be somewhat of an amateur sleuth; but sometimes curiosity kills our kind, as one might say. But my fate would seem to be worse than death, as I sit here staring at my ceiling.

A friend of mine, Richard Dane, had passed away in his sleep. I remembered that it was quite a small funeral, a few people packed tightly in a square above a tiny grave. The eulogy had been uninspiring; he had been a good man, but not with many friends. I was one of them, and proud to be so.

One detail that was originally lacking but should have been mentioned was how exactly he died, which could have been seen as peaceful but definitely was not; he had his eyes wide open, mouth curved in a half-scream, half-sowl, staring up at who knows what.

It was quite a coincidence that I had come to associate with the establishment known as *The Black Violin*. I am sort of a man-about-town, and often hear things that people do not, and so I found myself talking to a friend, who happened to be a musician who favored playing at strange institutions.

"It's very exclusive." He had said.

"Oh?" The remark peaked my curiosity.

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"Yes. Not many people know about it. I visited it only once, had one drink, and played a tune on the piano."

"What is it like?"

He began to recount the details; an exclusive club, yes, all dark and mysterious and whatnot, with no discernable entrance except for a small door in the front, and everyone entered as if in a trance, all dressed in black, with an unsaid understanding that they were all going to a very secret club and that each one must not speak a word of it.

He didn't speak much of the inside, except that men mostly fashioned in slick black hair with ponytails and the women in veils, and there was not so much talking, only a lot of nodding, as if there was a silent understanding of the thing. The piece he played had been a strange one, he couldn't remember it, but he remembered that he had asked for a drink and was given something odd in a martini glass, something so odd he neglected to drink it. Other patrons had odd glasses as well, filled with strange multi-colored fluids and sipping them with straws. There was a silent understanding, indeed among them, each knowing their place.

One thing he had noted was that there was a black door at the back, leading to God knows where, that occasionally one would enter and exit.

At any rate, being, as I said, somewhat of an amateur sleuth, I decided to find this party and join it.

Doing so was easier than I expected. I followed my friend's directions to a narrow alley, which was tucked away from nowhere, where a few people dressed in black waited at a nondescript door with no handle. I was mostly ignored, and at a certain time the door opened and the people went inside.

What was inside was stranger than I expected. There was a low hum of some kind of music, mostly baritone hums and a strange rhythm. I dressed in black myself, and nobody seemed to notice me.

I floated in as if in a trance, and many people approached the bar. There was no barter to speak of, just an exchange of nods from the patrons and the bartender, who procured the strange fluids in different glasses, none of which looked alike. Like snowflakes, each one was unique, and I suspected that there was something unique in each of them.

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One woman caught my eye, which made me quite nervous, as if the jig was up and I was discovered. But it was a cursory glance and then it was gone.

I stayed there, observing the room for how long I didn't know, and then at some point one guest entered the back room. It was what I was told; another strange nondescript door leading to some back enclave. It opened as quickly as it closed behind the figure.

I decided that it was time to go, being nervous at the woman's glance, so I exited quickly like a ghost. No one seemed to notice.

"I'd been to the Violin." I recounted to my friend, who seemed shocked.

"What did you do there?" He didn't seem to share the pride in my accomplishment.

"Oh, I don't know." I said, "It's like you said. Dark, and not much happening."

"Did you see the room?"

I nodded.

"Where does it go?"

"I don't know." I said, and resolved that that would not be my only trip to the Black Violin.

One thing that I should have paid more attention to was the fact that at the coffee shop I frequented with my friends there was a group of people, and one of whom I recognized in passing only for a moment.

It was the woman who had shot me a quick glance at the Violin, the woman who had noticed me but said nothing.

I mostly ignored her glance, but in her eyes there was a warning. One I should've heeded.

Don't go back, it said, and that was all.

However, I did go back, hoping to solve the mystery of the back room.

I found the place easier this time, and strayed in much like before. This time I resolved myself to stay longer, perhaps until the hours of the next morning, so I could discover what was in the back.

Since no-one seemed to notice my sleuthing about, at one point when no glances were apparent I decided to sneak up to the door of the mystery room. It had no handle, so I simply pushed it open with the ease of a saloon door.

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What I saw inside shocked me.

There was some machine, constructed of what seemed to be wood and bone, some of which I found familiar. For it was made of not just any bone, not just any leathery skins one would find that belonged to an animal. For in the middle of the thing there was an eye. Dried and polished, but it was no doubt a human eye.

The thing was made into some kind of mechanical contraption, and there was a piece of bone in its surface. I dared not touch it.

However, as luck would have it, a man entered the room at the same time I was in it. He didn't notice me, or didn't care that I was there.

With a creak he pulled the lever.

What I saw then shocked me, as I had been shocked by the machine itself. What had become a quiet dark room now swam with incredible monstrosities, demons and snakes and the like, and they danced. They danced with the patrons like they were old friends, brothers in arms, slinking in and out of their bodies with relish.

I fled the Violin at that time, quite terrified. Never to return, never to speak of it again.

I remembered the machine, how it was like an antique, made of human parts and with a lever for activation. I also remembered how the patrons had waited, waited for the time when that polished eye would yield its monsters, the monsters that danced among them like old friends.

Even though I resolved myself never to return to the Violin, I discovered something that renewed my link to the place, as if it wasn't over even though I never returned to the establishment.

It was something that had been left from my friend Dane. I remembered how we had had some kind of get-together, and he had been rather silent. He left something at my place I'd soon discover, something that was like a piece of a puzzle I had left unsolved.

His wallet. Even in his death that item was missing, and I found it among a little lost-and-found I often kept at my place for things people had left, as I was a sort of man-about-town as I mentioned earlier, and often had my friends, little as their numbers were, for a brandy or a coffee or something of the like.

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I chose to inspect it closer, finding it odd that in his death and funeral it had somehow been omitted, and one thing fell out that made me feel indeed quite afraid.

It was a card, all black, with a symbol I recognized. In a place I had fled, but noticed painted on the top of its ceiling.

It was a card taken from the Black Violin.

I remember how he had died, staring up and such, but never made the connection.

It seemed as if he had returned from the Violin, or had been there at some point, and seen something.

Something I saw. Maybe the dancing demons brought forth from that strange machine.

Don't go back.

I'm not sure how he had gotten hold of the card, taken from the bar. What I did surmise is that he had also disobeyed the warnings I myself received but discarded like so much trash.

He had seen the machine, seen the creatures.

And like me, had brought something with him.

It was then I knew that the woman's gaze had been a double message, one which I had ignored at the time.

If you can see them, they can see you.

And thus Dane had died, looking up as if expecting something. Something that he had brought with him, not heeding the advice he must have somehow been given.

They had come for him. The creatures from the Black Violin.

And so I sit, knowing that they knew me as they had Dane, for he had seen them as well.

Now they can see you.

You saw them.

And they will be coming.

So what he saw was still very much a mystery, but he had died in the process.

Died with knowledge, a recognition I now knew.

Now that you can see them, they can see you.

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That was the message I received. That one slithery glance, one look of recognition.

So even in my hasty retreat I knew I had brought back something with me, something terrible. Knowledge, a glance at something I wasn't supposed to see.

And so here I come to the present where I sit staring at the ceiling much as my friend did, knowing that they will come for me but not knowing when, as they knew me as much as I knew them, those strange fluid spirits that danced in the quiet.

When they would be coming for me as they had with Dane, I could only guess. But they would, and I would die as he did, simply by the sight of things that I had procured of as well.

I am doomed to his fate.

And I would be sitting like he did, face upwards, unable to sleep, waiting until the zero hour.

They will come now that they know you.

As if old friends, they would come to dance with me, but I would have the same reaction as my friend. Death.

All from several visits as a guest of the Black Violin.

THE END

James I. Wasserman is a 29-year-old Ph.D. student. He is mostly a horror writer but dabbles in dark humor and fantasy. He has featured stories in the Dogwood Journal as well as Planet SF, Zygote in my coffee, Anathematic, as well as upcoming publications in Wild Violet Magazine, Dark Fire, Scribe & Quill, the Unholy Biscuit, Demon Minds, The Gothic Revue, and Bewildering stories. Wasserman is always open to comments or other venues to publish or a chat and can be reached via www.jamesiwasserman.com

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Love Requited

James E. Gurley

I have always been intrigued with H.P. Lovecraft and August Derleth. Their style of mood setting has been a goal of mine. This particular story developed after watching a romantic movie about a killer. I felt the idea of an impossible love situation in conjunction with an improbable detective would go together well.

His soft footsteps echo down the narrow alley like angry accusations, bouncing back to his sensitive ears so loudly he has to stop. He grips his cane tightly and stares deeply into the surrounding shadows. All about is darkness, only darkness. His flaring nostrils detect the stench of rotting garbage and decaying filth. There is also something else in the air, not as strong as the garbage; the unmistakable reek of death. Perhaps others would miss it but not him. Death is a part of him like the scent of a woman's perfume, distinct and unquenchable.

He has come here this night seeking that from which most men flee in terror. That it is here in this alley he is certain. The authorities have found three victims near this spot, their bodies pale and dry, drained of all life essence. Tonight is the first night of the full of the moon. If not tonight, when would Evil walk the worn cobblestones and crumbling bricks of Arkham?

By the light of one of the few remaining streetlamps, he gazes upon his reflection in a puddle of dirty water. By his dress and stature, he appears to be a gentleman of the city, one of the idle rich, a man seeking the darker, seamier side of the city for a night of revelry. However, his face denies this: Gaunt and pale, eyes sunken into a long face, he looks more like one near death than near enjoyment. He strikes the puddle with his cane and smiles at the brief distortions caused by the ripples. His smile is just as brief.

Guilt weighs heavily upon him. He might have saved at least one of the poor wretched victims found here had he moved more quickly. Instead, his need for perfection and his attention to petty detail caused him to delay. A delay paid for in blood. He is now more determined than ever to stop this monster that stalks the city. His city.

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He hears the slight scuffle of shoes behind him and grins. His partner approaches cautiously, aware of his somber mood. It is true he is quick to anger but he fights this battle each day in an attempt to conform more to society's norms. His nature calls to him relentlessly. The throb of ancient drums pounds its insane rhythm in his ears. He tries to ignore them.

"Are we too late, Mr. Pickens?" his partner asks with a heavy cockney accent. Pickens' grin broadens into a smile. His partner has lived in America his entire life but it has not erased his tilted speech.

"No, we are on time," Pickens answers quickly. "It is our fiend who is late!"

His partner mumbles something unintelligible.

"What did you say, Wilfred?" Pickens asks sharply of his partner. That his plans have gone awry angers him. Breathing deeply, he tries to control his emotions. Wilfred is a good man and deserves better than he has received in the past.

"I said, 'Thank our lucky stars!'"

Pickens nods. Wilfred was not keen on accompanying him here tonight. Between the threats of the fiend that has struck thrice and Pickens' angered state, Wilfred much preferred to stay home. Not that Pickens could blame him: Poor Wilfred has too often borne the brunt of Pickens' uncontrolled rage. Wilfred accepted Pickens' nature as one accepts the inevitability of death, and anger rolls off his back like water on oil.

Pickens continues to examine the alley. Either by chance or by some slight change of the light, he spots a broach lying beside the puddle. Its diamond setting glittering in the flickering moonlight like a fallen speck of heaven caught his eye. The incongruous metaphor amuses him. There is no room for heaven in this alley.

"What's this?" He picks it up. It is a woman's broach of some value made of gold with a diamond about 1/2 carats in weight. It is shaped like a lily. "None of the victims were female," he mumbles to himself. "In fact, all three were males in their mid-thirties." He presses it to his nose and inhales deeply. There, above the dirt, damp and decay, he senses something more.

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"Is it a clue?" Wilfred asks adroitly. He sounds dumb and often acted dumb but his mind is as sharp as a razor's edge. If it were not so, Pickens would not have chosen him above the rest of the graduates at the Academy. His bumpkin façade is merely an effective ploy he uses to disarm those he questions in Pickens' service.

Pickens chuckles—a rare occurrence. "It is indeed! No broach of this kind would remain here in this alley long without being noticed by someone." He glances at the now empty theatre and the nearby restaurant. "There is a lot of foot traffic through here."

"Is our monster a woman, then, eh?"

"Both a monster and a woman!" he answers cryptically. "But I dare say this was left here for my benefit." He glances into the shadows above him and thinks he sees some small, furtive movement but if so, it is gone before he can look again. "Let's go, Wilfred. I fear we will learn nothing more tonight."

"Very good, sir! I'll fetch the car!" Wilfred trots around the corner, eager to out of the darkness. He knows that the darkness harbors things best left hidden.

The ride home is silent as Pickens broods over his find. Wilfred knows his partner well enough not to interfere when he is in deep thought. Pickens was prone to lash out first and regret his actions later.

The finding of the broach bothers Pickens. He is certain it was left there for his benefit and his alone. His first thought is that it was a sign that he is to be the next victim. Were the others so warned?

The fragrance he detected in the alley bothers him also. He is certain he knows its origin. Odors are the strongest of memory enhancers and long lost memories are beginning to bubble to the surface of his mind like unwanted houseguests. Noisy and troublesome.

It was less than five years earlier that he had first met Angela though it seems like a lifetime had passed. Like himself, she, too, bore the sins of the father. Unlike him, however, she could pass easily among the normal

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people of Arkham. Her scars were buried deeper than his own were and perhaps there lay the problem.

"I can help you, Angels," he had told her one morning after a night of passionate lovemaking. "You can absolve yourself of your past and embrace a new future. I have done it!"

Her laughter stung deeper than a lash of the whip. "You live your life in the dark because you fear what others may see in the light. You waste your life protecting people who would destroy you if they knew your secret!"

There was nothing he could say to that. She was right. He was a monster, a creature of the nether regions cast out to live among the humans. His choice to bury his origins had cost him his roots and he struggled daily to create a small world in which he could survive. How could he ask her to share it?

"I chose to protect the unwary from what lies in the depths and in the dark. It is my obligation."

"Your obligation! I want more from life! My great-grandfather brought this curse on my family. I wish to embrace my past and create my own future! Join me and we could be rich and powerful beyond your wildest dreams!"

"I cannot! I have made my choice and must see it through. I beg you to forgo your Dark yearnings and live in the light!"

They had grown apart soon after, she disappearing into her world of society balls and grand affairs and he to his job. Perhaps they were destined to meet again, soon.

Pickens' quarters on the east side of town overlook the Arkham Cemetery. Many would find the sight of this forlorn landmark to be disconcerting with its ever-present night mists and history of strange occurrences. Pickens finds the view relaxing and somehow beautiful in its morbid serenity. He often stares at the timeworn marble statues and moss-grown mausoleums for hours as his mind puzzles out the complexities of some case on which he is involved.

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Even now, he watches as a slight breeze moves the mists like a blanket upon a bed. Like a sickly, white wave it soundlessly breaks and crashes on the stones and statues, swirling into fingers that stretch toward the stars but fall back upon themselves.

He cannot shake the feeling that someone, or something, out there was watching the very window before which he sits, pipe lit and curls of smoke drifting out the window. He gazes into the mists and notices a slight movement but perhaps it is only his imagination, or, more likely, things often move in the night mists that have no bearing on him or his business. They move to their own accords and to their own macabre rhythms.

The moon had set and the first tendrils of dawn reach out of the ocean to paint the land with a bloody palette. There will be a storm soon. He can feel the turmoil of the clouds churning in his body.

He turns from the window. There is time to salvage some sleep before dusk. Tonight, he will find and put an end to the fiend that has plagued his city, whatever the cost.

However, his sleep is troubled by dreams, snapshots of his past warped by time and guilt into nightmares from which there is no escape for he knows that when he awakens, they will still be with him.

It is said lightning never strikes the same place twice though there are many dead and twisted trees in Arkham that bear mute testimony to the fallacy of this adage. He returns to the alley again for this very reason. If thrice visited, why not a fourth time? Tonight, he will play the part of victim, a part ordained for him by the villain.

Wilfred, having done all asked of him, waits a block away in the car. He is ready if needed but would serve no purpose tonight but as a distraction to what must be done. Lighting his pipe, Pickens leans heavily against his cane and waits.

The storm has washed the city clean but the alley still bears the lingering stench of death. It has soaked into the bricks and stone of the alley and dripped into the sewers below. This city will perhaps never be entirely washed of its past. Its history is long and colored red with the

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blood of many innocent people—some not as innocent as they are portrayed.

A slight difference in the air around him lets Pickens know that he is not alone. A slight tinkle sounds above as some piece of mortar or stone dislodges and clatters to the bricks below. He resists the temptation to look up.

The foulness of the grave assaults his nostrils as he hears the slight tread of footsteps approaching.

"You have returned as I hoped!" The voice is feminine as he expects but beneath the words, he feels the strength and power of many men.

Still not turning, he replies sadly. "I could not ignore your invitation, my love. That would not be well mannered." He holds out the broach. As quickly as lightning, it is snatched from his hand. He sees only the briefest flash of foul flesh.

"Thank you for its return. It has been in my family for many generations. It pained me to part with it but I sensed you were different from other men. I knew you would return it to me!" A silent chuckle escapes her throat as she plays him as a cat plays with a mouse. He is hers and she knows it, has been hers since childhood.

"Tell me, Angela. How did you come to this end?"

She moves back several steps, caught off guard by his use of her name.

"How...how did you know?" Her voice sounds plaintive, as if now that her secret was out, the charade was ended.

"The lily broach: There are few like it. I have read my Arkham history thoroughly and have seen it on a certain woman's neck many times, your lovely neck. I know of your great-grandfather's exploits and something of your family's history. I learned it from your own sweet lips. I suppose tainted blood has run in your family for generations, since the days of Titus."

A hiss like a thousand snakes erupts from her. "How dare you? My family has served this city faithfully! This...this curse fell upon me because I sought deeply after dark knowledge as did my great-grandfather! What are a few lone men when I offer the city so much through my family's wealth and generosity?"

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She now stands before Pickens; her face inches from his. Her foulness envelopes him like a shroud but he cannot retreat. He sees traces of the woman he once loved in her broken features. She had been a beautiful woman, once, but years of living a lie have taken their toll on her. Her features were no longer human. They bear the unmistakable, unblinking manner of a serpent.

Her pale, scaly skin rustles as she moves. Her teeth are long and hollow—pointed like tiny daggers. This was how she consumed the juices of her victims, he noted.

"You mistake me, Angela! I did not come to destroy you but to plead with you to stop your murderous rages. No one knows but me. For all we once meant to each other, I beg you to stop!"

"I cannot!" she screams. "They are part of me! They are the essence of me!"

Pickens shakes his head, refusing her answer. Once, they had been lovers, friends for many years before that. That she has given in to the dark side distresses him. "No!" he shouts. "You can overcome these urges. I will help."

"You?" she laughs, her voice the hissing of the cobra preparing to strike. "You think every one born such as we were can change, even desires to change. Alas, some of us relish the cry of the beast inside; feel pleasure at its release!"

Pickens shakes his head slowly, as if coming out of a trance, a trance caused by fond memories turned false. "It cannot continue. I have sworn myself to protect this city from those like you, like us! It is my duty to stop you!"

"Duty! Stop me!" she sneers. "I can feel your heart pounding inside with passion for me still! You yearn to join me. Come! Together, we can taste the essences of many mortals and live far beyond our span of years. Join me, my once lover, or you will become my next victim! Your blood and fluids will fill me and I will live forever!" She pauses, awaiting his answer.

"No one lives forever," he intones sadly, "and I fear there is no love left in me. I have drained it from my body as you have drained the fluid from your victims. Let me help you, I beg of you!"

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She lunges at him, her teeth inches from his neck. He grabs her cheeks and forces her mouth away. He can read the surprise in her eyes. Humans do not struggle so! She redoubles her efforts, clawing at his body and twisting like serpent. He places one hand under her chin and the other behind her back and raises her body from the ground.

She struggles violently and screams in his ear. "Stop! You cannot!"

He pays no heed to her pleas. He has given her the chance to change as he had given to others of her kind. A few had listened and these he had helped conform to society's standards. They lived quietly on the edges of society but still bound by its laws. She would not. The lust for killing had taken hold in her too deeply. Her family's history worked against her. Too many times had the blighted fingers of Arkham's history reached savagely into the Crowe genes, beginning with her great uncle Titus!

The legacy of the Old Ones would not be denied.

With a final snap, he breaks her spine. Her eyes stare into his as he gently lays her on the ground. There is one final thing to be done. He takes his cane and twists off one end, revealing a long, silver blade. He plunges it deep into her heart and looks into her eyes as the life pours from them. Her clawed hands tighten on his cloak in death and rip it from his shoulders as she writhes in agony on the dirty pavement.

Her dead eyes stare at him, accusing. Did she see his misshapen body, his pale, dead skin and know, in her death, that he was more like her than those whom he had sworn to protect? Did she suspect how little she would have had to say to prevent this end?

He replaces his cloak, once more becoming no different from any other man walking down the street. He knows, though, that no cloak can hide what he was.

He had not lied to her. He, too, was born of a family whose roots burrowed deeply into Arkham's tainted soil. He had not been blessed at his Christening but instead cursed. Still, he had found it possible to fight against the urges that coiled and writhed just beneath his skin, to use them when necessary.

He would never be one of them, the humans who lived their human lives and worked at their human jobs. He was what he was meant to be—a creature of the night. The Old Ones, in their infinite wisdom, had seen fit

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to place shepherds among the sheep, someone to watch over them and keep their minds from delving too deeply into the past. Man was not yet ready for the dark secrets that lay buried deep beneath his feet.

Picking up her broken body, he carries it gently back to the car.

"Finished then, Mr. Pickens?" Wilfred asks, as he puts away the magazine he was trying to read by the weak light of the streetlamp.

Pickens reverently places the body in the trunk. He reaches out his hand and closes her dead, unseeing eyes. Then he leans over and kisses her forehead.

"Yes, finished, Wilber," he says as he wipes the blood from his hands.

"To the Cemetery?" Wilber asks.

"Yes, to the Cemetery."

He will place her body in her family's crypt. A few people would wonder what had become of her but he doubted her family would make much of a public fuss. Better to let her disappear quietly than to call too much attention to themselves. They could claim a long European trip.

As they approach the Cemetery, he sees the mist rise from the ground, inviting home one of its own. Would it do the same for him when his time came or was he now too deeply bound to the humans?

He leaves Wilber waiting in the car as he carries her body to the crypt. The mists have not invited Wilber, would invite no human into their midst.

They lap about Pickens' feet like a family pet as he walks slowly, burdened by his load. He feels their gentle caress as he lowers her body to the marble pedestal. The mists climb up and over her, welcoming her to their world.

As he walks away, he feels a touch of envy. She lies among the mists and he—he must return to his rooms to await his next call.

With love requited, he knew he would answer.

THE END

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The Shadow Over Bexley

Chuck McKenzie

In recent years I've found the process of translating personal horrors into humorous prose to be infinitely more therapeutic than a trip to the shrink. Thus, inevitably, I composed a piece poking fun at the three things that scare me more than anything else: the nightmarish worlds of H.P Lovecraft, silly old buggers in robes, and Motivational Speakers. Spiders come a close fourth, but I couldn't work them into the plot.

Later, Eric would berate himself for not just sodding off home as soon as Ted mentioned the words 'motivational tour' ...

"New bloke coming along tonight." Ted sipped at his shandy, leaning casually on his walking-frame.

Mike raised a greying eyebrow. "Didn't know we had an initiation scheduled."

Eric frowned. "Shouldn't be discussing Lodge business in public!" he grouched into his beer. Unconsciously, his free hand wandered to the Sacred Insignia sewn over the breast of his crimson robes. "It's bloody disrespectful!"

Ted looked pained. "We're in the Lodge *bar*. Anyway," he said to Mike, "he's not a recruit. Some big-wig from an affiliated order overseas."

"Bloody Yank!" muttered Eric. "Bet he's a bloody Yank! Met enough bloody Yanks in Korea to last me a bloody lifetime! Bloody Yanks!"

"New England, apparently."

"That's off the coast of Scotland, isn't it?" asked Mike.

"Nah, that's the Falklands. New England's in America."

"Bloody Yanks!" Eric scratched savagely at his chin with an arthritic, liver-spotted hand. *Bastards think they own the world, and now they're poking their noses into our bloody Lodge!*

"Anyway," Ted continued, "this bloke just turns up on Ken's doorstep, here on a 'motivational tour'. At least, that's what Steve told me. And he heard it from Fred, who heard it from Bert. And Bert heard it from Kevin, who was there when this guy arrived."

"What the hell's a motivational tour?" demanded Eric.

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"Pep talks. Wants to get us enthused about the sacred rituals again."

Eric sniffed dismissively. Admittedly, the fortnightly meetings *had* lacked a certain something of late. Oh, the sacred rituals of The Order of the Mottled Gecko (Bexley) were all still properly observed, as they had been since the Order's inception in 1949; the secret handshake (thumbs in), the naming of The Artefacts (The Letter Opener and The Glass Eye, donated by the late Arthur Nonce), and, of course, the chook-raffle afterwards. But the sense of *purpose* once associated with these rituals had waned. Eric suspected that—like himself, though he'd never have admitted it—many of the members were beginning to feel that the idea of a bunch of senior citizens running around in robes was ... well, *a bit silly*.

Still, it was one thing to *think* such things, quite another to actually suggest that they needed to drag in some bloody Yank motivational speaker! Besides which, there was a certain comfort in the predictability of the meetings, and Eric wasn't sure he could be *bothered* getting all enthused about the rituals again.

The thin bingling of the gong drifted through the bar.

"Here we go," said Ted, draining his shandy. "All in, fellas."

They trudged dutifully into the main hall to join the other forty or so attendees, a collective shuffling filling the oak-beamed building as they bumbled about between the fold-down modular pews, exchanging mumbled greetings through ill-fitting dentures, seeking their usual seats. Barely had they sat down when the gong bingled again, and they struggled back to their feet, rheumy eyes cast reverently floorward.

With a flourish of purple robes, the Illustrious Potentate (Ken McFinnis, from No. 42) took the rostrum at the front of the hall, adjusting the microphone carefully. There was a squeal of feedback, and those with hearing-aids grimaced. The Illustrious Potentate cleared his throat. "We thank The Almighty for His protection and guidance, and pledge faithfully to serve Him, and to uphold the sanctity and secrecy of Our Order."

"Mumble-umble-umble," echoed the congregation.

The Illustrious Potentate bowed his head momentarily, then sighed, fished his spectacles out from under his robes, put them on, and beamed at the congregation. "Well, welcome along once again," he said, as the assemblage resumed their seats. "We'll be getting to the usual Lodge

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business in just a moment, but first I'd like to begin with something a little different." He paused to let the enormity of this statement sink in.

The congregation looked appropriately awed. And well they might, thought Eric. There hadn't been a change in the running-order of the Lodge meetings since ... well, *ever*. Not unless you counted the time Neddy Johnston had his conniption fit during the Rite of the Ascendant Hairpiece

...

"Gentlemen," Ken continued, "it gives me very great pleasure to introduce our guest speaker for tonight. Will you please welcome, from our affiliated Arkham Lodge, The Esoteric Order of Dagon—"

"What'd he say?" Mike whispered to Ted. "Ethnic Order of the Dago?"

"—the Most High Seer, Jebediah Marsh," concluded Ken, and there was a patter of polite applause as he took a seat in the front-row pew.

There was a pause, then a man emerged from the shadows behind the rostrum; tall, lean, and dressed in a snappy black suit. Stepping up to the microphone, he gazed at the congregation for a moment with dark, piercing eyes, his pallid face utterly devoid of expression. The effect, thought Eric, was quite unsettling. *Not bad enough he's a Yank, but a creepy Yank to boot!*

The congregation shuffled. Somebody coughed pointedly.

Marsh blinked, then grinned; a brilliant toothy smile that instantly transformed his face from ghoulish to simply manic. "Hey, thanks guys! Great to be here!" His powerful voice filled the hall. "How you all doing tonight?"

Silence.

"C'mon, guys!" he prompted. "Let's hear it! How you feeling tonight? Good? Yeah? C'mon let's hear it!"

There was a half-hearted muttering from the congregation.

"Great! Okay!" Marsh clapped his hands together theatrically, and the congregation started. "I wanna kick off by asking you all a real important question." He paused, eyeing his audience speculatively. "Why do you do it?"

The members of the congregation glanced sidelong at one-another. "I mean, hey," Marsh spread his hands wide, "the public service, the charity work—why do you actually *do* it?"

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Silence.

"Anyone?"

Ted hesitantly raised his hand.

Marsh pointed. "Yeah! What's your name?"

"Um ... Ted."

"Okay Ted, stand up so we can all hear you! Big hand for Ted, everyone!" Ted clambered stiffly to his feet, as Marsh led the bemused congregation in a round of applause. "Okay Ted, why do we do the charity work?"

"Because ... it gives us a sense of satisfaction?"

Marsh nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, not bad, but *why* does it give us a sense of satisfaction?" He glanced around the hall again as Ted sat down. "Let me tell you what *I* think, okay?" He paused for a moment, steepling his fingers. "I believe we find the community work satisfying because it makes us feel *superior* to those we're assisting. Makes us feel important. *Powerful, even.*"

The congregation began to mutter rebelliously. *What a load of crap!* thought Eric.

"So we all agree," Marsh continued. "We do it for the power. Problem is, community service doesn't *really* give you power. Not real life-and-death-over-others power, which—let's face it—is the only kinda power that really matters. So," his eyes gleamed. "How do we go about achieving that power?"

Silence.

"Okay, here's an easier question. What sets a Lodge apart from other community groups? What do we do that's different? Anyone?"

Mike raised his hand.

"Yes! What's your name? Mike? Let's hear it for Mike, everyone! Okay Mike, what's the answer?"

"The rituals?"

"Yes! The rituals, exactly! And why do we go through the rituals? Anyone?"

There was a very long pause. Marsh obviously wasn't going to answer this one for them, Eric realized, but the rest of the silly old buggers hadn't

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twigged yet. The silence continued. Eventually, Eric could stand it no longer. "Tradition!" he snapped.

Piercing eyes met Eric's own, and Eric felt a chill run down his spine. He'd never been given to flights of wild fancy, but Marsh's gaze ... well, it was like looking into the eyes of a fish. Cold orbs, untouched by the manic grin on Marsh's face. Almost as if Marsh's body were nothing but a fleshy puppet, outwardly expressing an emotion that went unfelt by the inhuman puppeteer within.

"Yes! What's your name?" asked Marsh.

Eric hesitated, prompting several of his peers to turn around in their seats and squint expectantly at him. "Eric," he said, grudgingly.

Marsh grinned. "Well, Eric, you're absolutely right! Performance of the rituals is a *tradition*." He eyed the congregation again. "*And nothing more!* It doesn't actually serve *any useful purpose*." He paused. "Am I right?"

Silence. Then, a mutter of reluctant agreement. *Bastard!* thought Eric hatefully. *Why not just come out and say it? That none of it means anything, that we're just a bunch of pathetic old farts pottering about in a stupid little club! Motivational speaker, my arse!*

"So," Marsh continued, eyes narrowing conspiratorially, "wouldn't it be great if the rituals contributed *directly* to your accumulation of power?"

There was a pause, as the congregation digested this notion.

"Okay, listen, let's get everyone standing up!" Marsh beamed enthusiastically. "C'mon, everyone up!" There was a reluctant shuffling as the gathering rose. "Great stuff, that's it! Now, I want each of you to grab the hand of the person either side of you, form a chain across each row ..."

"Bugger that!" muttered Eric loudly.

Marsh smiled sympathetically. "Hey, that's okay. If you're not comfortable with this, just sit back and join in whenever you're ready." He glanced around. "Okay, what I'm gonna do now is teach you all a chant we use in Arkham—nothing complicated, just a little something to clear and focus the mind."

Good luck with this lot, thought Eric, sourly. *Most of 'em can't remember what they had for lunch.*

"Okay, repeat after me." Marsh raised his arms dramatically above his head. "*Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!*"

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Hesitantly, the congregation repeated the phrase, aging tongues grappling with the unfamiliar syllables.

"Again!" Marsh commanded, and they grudgingly obeyed. "And again!" The words were beginning to flow more smoothly.

"And again—keep it going! *Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn..!*"

Eric looked around incredulously at his fellow members; bright-eyed, chanting along with the sort of enthusiasm usually reserved for an RSL buffet. *What the hell's gotten into them? It's as if they're actually getting off on this...gibberish!*

And yet ...

Eric blinked. There *was* a rather pleasant rhythm to the words, comforting yet invigorating. Made him feel secure. *Powerful*. As though he could do *anything*... Slowly, his senses began to dull, the chant becoming a dull throb in his head. Reality faded -

A sudden squeal of feedback tore through the veil of sleep, the entire congregation starting as Marsh tapped the microphone sharply. *Jesus!* thought Eric. *What's he trying to do—give us all heart attacks?* Which, he reflected, was a distinct risk with this crowd.

"Hey, that was great!" Marsh beamed. "Give yourselves a big hand! C'mon! You did a great job! Yeah, c'mon!" A patter of applause started up, slowly swelling to a roar as the congregation enthusiastically demonstrated their appreciation. Marsh nodded his thanks. "Hey, listen, you guys have been really great, but I'm afraid my time's up for tonight—"

Eric glanced at his watch. A full hour had passed!

"—so I'll let you get back to the usual Lodge business, and just say thanks a whole bunch for having me, and I'll be back next week to show you the next step in the Real Power program! Have a great night!" He waved cheerily, stepping back from the rostrum as Ken rose from his seat and added a few words of thanks.

Ted nudged Eric. "Can't wait to see what happens next meeting, eh?"

Eric snorted. "Count me out! Never heard so much blasphemous crap in all my life!" The activities of the Lodge were firmly grounded in the Christian faith, and there had seemed to Eric to be a distinctly un-Christian feel to that chant. Not that Eric was particularly devout, or

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anything. Not even a Sunday Christian, really. But—well, dammit, it was just *wrong*, that was all!

And yet, he had to admit, there *had* been some sort of power behind that chant. And he wasn't altogether sure that he didn't want to feel that sense of power again...

Eric chewed his lip. It couldn't hurt to attend the next meeting, he decided, just to see what happened.

"Should be a good one tonight!" said Ted, sipping his shandy.

Mike nodded agreement. Eric shrugged listlessly. He'd been unable to think of anything but that damned chant all week, and despite wanting to hear it again, to feel the accompanying sense of power, he still couldn't shake the feeling that there was something *wrong* about all of this. Something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

Creepy Yank.

Eric nodded. Ah, yes. *That* was it.

The gong binged.

"All in, fellas," said Ted.

The hall had undergone some changes since the last meeting. Black bedsheets hung from the walls, shrouding the floor at the front of the hall, giving it the cheesy appearance of a witches' grotto at a high-school fête. In place of the rostrum sat—well, the only word Eric could think of was 'eyesore'. The thing was clearly supposed to be an altar of some sort, although it looked more like a chest-high pile of rubble; fist-sized lumps of black rock (or paper maché, more likely) piled haphazardly together, with a thick slab of stone (Styrofoam?) lying atop it.

Eric sniffed contemptuously, and took his seat.

A few moments later a figure emerged from the shadows behind the altar, and the congregation fell silent. Dressed in a long black cloak, Marsh approached the altar, bowed his head for a moment, then looked up and grinned. "Hey, how you all doing tonight? Great to see you all back again! Tonight we're going to pick up where we left off last time. You all

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remember the chant? Okay, great, well, let's get everyone up the front here and we can get started!"

The congregation obligingly shuffled from their seats up to the front of the hall, where they stood milling around, waiting for further direction.

"Okay, I want everyone to form a circle around myself and the altar. That's it, big circle. Now," Marsh continued, "before we start, I want to explain a little bit about tonight's ritual, and how it fits in with our plans."

So stop waffling, and bloody get on with it! thought Eric.

Impossibly, as if he'd read his mind, Marsh shot Eric a chilling look. Eric shuddered.

Marsh grinned again. "Okay, the thing to remember is that The Esoteric Order of Dagon, like most Lodges, is essentially a Christian organization." Again, he glanced at Eric. "I know some of you may have had concerns in that regard, but there's nothing sinister about the rituals we use. Like you guys, the E.O.D. takes certain specific aspects of Christianity, which we modify to better suit our particular requirements. Of course, most of these changes are just cosmetic. Fr'instance, we don't refer to 'God', but to 'Dagon', although we're basically talking about the same guy, okay?"

Eric rolled his eyes. A few other members of the congregation looked doubtful, but the rest nodded agreeably. This was something they could relate to, thought Eric sourly; the theatrical aspect of the Lodge, which made an otherwise fairly dull set of activities a bit more exciting.

"Now," Marsh continued, "one of the E.O.D's cornerstone beliefs is that Dagon can actually be induced to intervene directly in mortal affairs. Y'know, put in the occasional appearance, spread around a little of that godly power." This raised a chuckle from the congregation. "I mean, hey, why worship a God who only rewards his followers *after* they die?"

Christianity, my eye! thought Eric. This is bloody pagan worship! Can't these stupid old buggers see that? He opened his mouth to speak his mind, but was silenced by another bone-chilling look from Marsh.

"Problem is," Marsh went on, "Dagon lives in a whole other dimension from ours. So, if we want to share in his power—which we do, right?" There was a chorus of agreement. "Well, it's up to us to open a dimensional portal which he can use to get here!"

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The congregation nodded eagerly, hanging on his every word. *What the hell's wrong with them?* Eric wondered. *It's as if he's got some sort of hold over them! Little creep'll be advocating human sacrifice in a moment!*

"Now, the great thing about this program," said Marsh, "is that it doesn't take a lifetime, just three simple steps. Firstly," he held up a finger, "we have to draw Dagon's attention to this exact point in time and space, which we did last week with the chanting. Secondly," he held up another finger, "we need to give him a reason to *remember* this location. And that's what we'll be doing tonight!" He turned, gesturing off to his right. "Guys, you all know Mike. Well, Mike's going to be helping me out with tonight's ritual, so let's give him a big hand! C'mon up here, Mike!" Beaming, Mike bumbled up to Marsh, shaking his hand warmly as the congregation applauded.

"Up onto the altar, thanks Mike. Lying down." Marsh addressed the congregation again as Mike complied.

"Okay guys, what I need you to do is hold hands, forming an unbroken chain around the altar, and then I want you to start chanting again. Everyone remember the chant? *Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!* Okay?"

There was a babble of assent. Eric glanced around the circle. The faces of his peers shone with enthusiasm. *More exciting than rolling Arthur Nonce's glass eye across a ouija board, I s'pose,* he thought grudgingly. *But still, it's just another bloody ritual. Why so enthused?* He eyed Marsh suspiciously. *He's definitely got a hold over them. Lucky I'm made of sterner stuff...*

"Oh, and just one more thing," Marsh added, an uncharacteristically serious expression on his face. "Whatever you see and hear during the ritual, don't—under *any* circumstances—break the circle! And keep the chant going until—" he paused, and a sly smile touched the corners of his mouth, "well, you'll know when to stop, believe me! So, let's hear it—*Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!*"

The congregation took up the chant with gusto, their voices filling the hall. Again, Eric experienced that odd sensation of comfort and power. Realising he was the only person not chanting, he began mouthing the words, glancing surreptitiously about him. Marsh didn't seem to be

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chanting in sync with the others. Eric strained his ears, and caught part of the incantation;

"Iä! Dagon! Cthulhu fhtagn! N'gai ygnaiih! Iä! Iä! Dagon!"

Marsh's chanting grew louder, the congregation increasing their volume to match his. A weird green glow began to emanate from the altar, shining dimly between the rocks.

"Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!"

Marsh reached beneath his cloak and withdrew a long, ceremonial-looking dagger from his belt, holding it aloft with both hands. *"Iä! Dagon! N'yah ph'naii! Äi! Äi! Dagon! Dagon! DAGON!"*

With a horrifying flash of clarity, Eric realised what was about to happen. He opened his mouth to shout a warning—

And Marsh slammed the dagger down.

Mike let out a single, piercing shriek, his hands jerking like poisoned spiders. Then he slumped motionless, eyes staring.

The chanting stopped.

"Hold the circle!" Marsh commanded. He carefully withdrew the dagger, wiping both sides of the blade clean against Mike's robes.

Somebody began to mutter nervously. Eric gagged. *Maniac! He's just killed Mike!*

A hideous sucking noise arose from the altar. The congregation stared as Mike began to twitch and jerk. The sucking became a loathsome gobbling, as a pig might make at a feeding trough. Imperceptibly at first, then with increasing speed, Mike began to sink *into* the altar-top like a hot knife into butter. Hands and feet vanished. Knees and elbows. Torso. A cloud of vapour shrouded the altar, a sickly sweet odour filling the air...

The vapour cleared. Mike was gone, the altar vacant. No glow, just an unremarkable pile of stones.

Silence.

Marsh took a step back, tucked the dagger away beneath his cloak, and bowed his head. Then he straightened, glanced around, and grinned. "Hey, fantastic job, guys! Give yourselves a big hand! And let's hear it for my partner in crime, Mike!"

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There was a brief, uncomprehending silence. Then someone chuckled. Someone else began to applaud. In moments, the entire congregation was clapping and laughing and cheering appreciatively. Marsh beamed.

"Oh, I don't believe it!" Ted grinned incredulously. "It was all a bloody illusion!"

"Wh-what?" Eric stammered.

"A magic trick! Bloody convincing, too!"

"Trick?" Eric gazed at the altar.

"And Mike was in on it!" Ted shook his head wonderingly. "He's a bloody dark horse, isn't he? Boring as batshit, usually. I s'pose after we've gone home tonight, Marsh'll open the top of that altar, Mike'll climb out, and they'll both have a bloody good laugh at our expense!"

Eric didn't trust himself to answer ...

Mike was conspicuous by his absence at the next meeting.

Eric and Ted stood silently in the bar, Ted drinking, Eric regarding Ted hatefully over the rim of his glass. He'd spent the past two weeks dreading this meeting, dreading the prospect of turning up and finding his suspicions confirmed. Mike had been murdered; of that Eric was certain. Well, almost certain. He'd been nursing a tiny shred of hope that it *had* been a trick. But now ...

"Odd, isn't it?" he remarked bitterly. "Mike not being here this week."

Ted shrugged. Eric glared at him. *Don't you care?* he felt like screaming. *Don't you understand what's happened?* Marsh's influence over the congregation had grown; that was obvious. *So it's up to me*, he thought. *It's up to me to—*

To do what? Call the police? *Eric cringed. He'd already tried that. Sort of. That is, he'd picked up the phone, the morning after the last meeting, and begun dialling 000. And then he'd stopped. What if it had been a trick? He'd look a right bloody fool if he went and reported a non-existent murder. And even if Mike had been murdered, what the hell could Eric say to the cops? Yes officer, I'd like to report a murder. A friend of mine's been sacrificed by a mad pagan cultist at a Masonic Lodge meeting. The*

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body? Oh, sucked into another dimension and consumed by some eldritch god, apparently ...

They'd put him away. Better to wait, just in case Mike *did* turn up ...

The gong binged. Ted drained his shandy. "All in, fellas."

The hall was still set up as it had been last meeting, and Marsh beckoned them all up to the altar. "Hey guys! How you all doing? Great to see you! Okay, let's get everyone into a circle around the altar, and we can get started—"

"Where's Mike?" Eric demanded. "How come he's not here?"

His peers frowned disapprovingly at the outburst. Marsh regarded Eric carefully. "Who knows? Having a quiet night in?" He held Eric's gaze for a moment, then returned his attention to the general congregation. "Anyway, tonight we should see the fruit of all your hard work over the past few meetings. And hey, give yourselves a big hand, you've really earned it!"

There was a burst of tumultuous applause.

"Now," said Marsh, as the applause died down, "I want you to understand that there *are* risks involved in tonight's ritual. But if we stick to the program it'll all be worth it. At our first meeting we drew the attention of the Elder Gods to this location with our chanting. At the next meeting we gave them an incentive to stick around, waiting for the doorway to open again – blood sacrifice." He met Eric's gaze again. "Of course, we can't actually go around sacrificing our members," the congregation chuckled appreciatively, "but even a mock-sacrifice, with the promise of bloodshed to come, should get Dagon's attention. And tonight we're going to take advantage of that and draw him in. Except he won't find any blood when he arrives – just a containment spell, which'll hold him in our dimension while protecting us from him. And then we'll be in a position to demand anything we want!" Marsh's eyes shone maniacally, his expression mirrored in the faces of the congregation. "So, let's start by holding hands and getting that chant going! *Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn ..!*"

Mock-sacrifice, my arse! thought Eric. *Poor Mike isn't at home—he was murdered to satisfy this maniac's lust for power! I'm getting the hell*

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out of here! He tried to step forward, but strong hands either side of him held him firm. "Ted! Please! Let go!" he hissed.

Ted ignored the plea, spittle spraying from his dentures as he continued to chant, eyes shining feverishly. "*Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!*"

The floorboards seemed to throb beneath Eric's feet as the chanting grew steadily louder. His head swam, and the altar again began to glow like some fetid night-blooming fungus.

"*IÄ! IÄ! CTHULHU FHTAGN! IÄ! IÄ! CTHULHU FHTAGN!*"

"*IÄ! DAGON!*" bellowed Marsh. "*IÄ! CTHULHU! IÄ! NYARLATHOTEP Ë YOG-SOTHOTH! N'YAH M'GAWAH'AL N'GAI Ë DAGON!*"

The space above the altar shimmered as if in the grip of a heat wave, and suddenly there was a *hole*, dark and apparently bottomless, the mouth of which floated mid-air in blatant defiance of the laws of physics.

"*IÄ! IÄ! CTHULHU FHTAGN!*"

Gaping, Eric stared into the blackness.

Something terrible stared back at him.

Eric screamed, his mind filtering the image in an effort to preserve his sanity. Huge. Hungry eyes. Coiled limbs. Rubbery. Gelid. Monstrous claws. Reaching out—

"*DAGON!*" bellowed Marsh. "*BUGG-SHOOGOG Y'HAH Y'HA-NTHLEI!*"

"*NO!*" screamed Eric. Breaking free of the circle, he threw himself at Marsh, ignoring the pain in his arthritic limbs. "*IT'S COMING THROUGH! YOU'LL KILL US ALL!*"

Caught off-guard, Marsh stopped mid-chant as Eric fell against him. "*What the hell—?*" Abruptly, his expression changed to one of utter terror. "*THE CONTAINMENT SPELL!*" he shrieked. "*I HAVEN'T COMPLETED - !*"

Quick as lightning, vast talons reached from the hole, engulfed Marsh, and withdrew.

Silence.

Torn from their hypnotic state, the congregation stared in horror. Choking with fear, rooted to the spot, Eric stared into the darkness. He blinked.

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And something rushed towards him.

He shrieked, turning to flee, and an agonising pressure enfolded his body, squeezing the breath from his lungs. *Heart attack?* Dragged backwards into the darkness at freight-train speed, he felt himself raised up impossibly high. A vast chasm opened before him. Purple. Moist. Lined with endless rows of white, pointed *teeth?*

Should have just sodded off home the moment Ted mentioned the words 'motivational tour', was Eric's last thought.

Dago tossed the squirming morsel down his maw, then poked around in the bowl for another, but the portal at the bottom had closed up. He picked up the bowl and waved it at the barkeep. "Hey! Can I get a fresh one of these?" Taking a mouthful of brew, he turned back to his companions. "Anyway, sorry, all I was saying is that lately it's all been getting a bit—" he shrugged apologetically, "—tedious. Know what I mean?"

The others nodded glumly. After countless aeons, it was finally beginning to dawn upon them that there was something vaguely silly about a bunch of Elder Gods running around like shoggoths.

"Maybe ..." Great Ctharsis began, then trailed off.

"What?" asked Dago.

"Well," said Ctharsis cautiously, "I know this really fun guy from Yuggoth. Works as a motivational speaker. Maybe ..?"

There was a thoughtful pause. Yog-Sodoff nodded slowly. "Not a bad idea. Reckon you could book him in for the next meeting?"

Ctharsis nodded. "Sure. Let's see if we can't renew some enthusiasm for the ancient rituals!"

They all nodded eagerly, remembering the Old Times, when the rituals had seemed important; the Elder Signs, the Pnakotic Manuscripts, the Necronomicon—heck, maybe getting back into all that stuff would even help point the Way Back In ...

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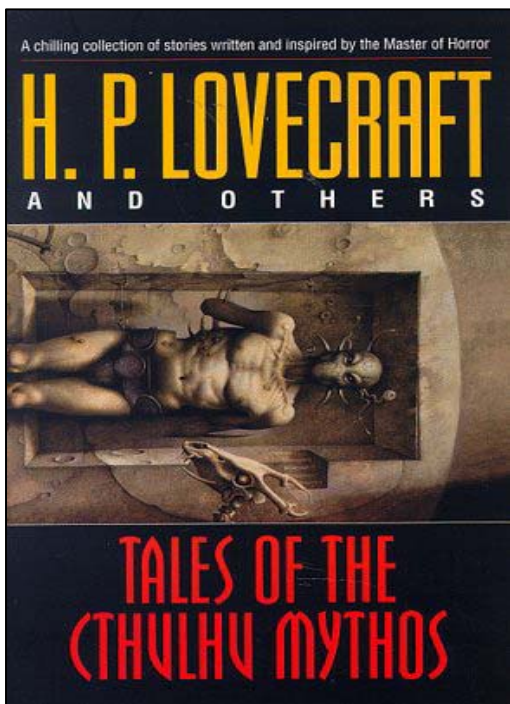
An agonised caterwauling split the air, rising to an ear-bursting shriek of pure anguish, as though some unfortunate creature were being slowly disembowelled.

"Here we go," said Dago, draining his brew. "All in, fellas ..."

THE END

Chuck McKenzie was born in 1970, and still spends most of his time there. He writes short stories, and sometimes people publish them, which is nice. He is also author of the SF comedy novel *Worlds Apart* (Hybrid Publishers, 1999), and co-editor, with Tansy Rayner Roberts, of *AustrAlien Absurdities: Comic Tales of SF, Fantasy & Horror* by Australian Writers (Agog! Press, 2002). If you visit the Official Chuck McKenzie Infosite you'll discover a wealth of information about Chuck that you probably would have been better off not knowing, so you'll only have yourself to blame. Infosite: <http://members.optusnet.com.au/chuckmck1/>

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"It seems fitting, (then), that the epitaph on Lovecraft's tombstone reads simply, "I am Providence." He certainly captured the essence of the (that) city, and carried its essence within him; but the dictionary also defines "providence" as "fore-sight." Though he may not have intended it, Lovecraft gave future readers a new way of reading weird fiction and a new way of imagining the universe. Absolutely he is Providence in every sense of the word. "

■ Poppy Z. Brite

Excerpted from "Being Providence" - Waking Up Screaming: Haunting Tales of Terror By H.P. Lovecraft (Del Rey, 2003)

<http://www.poppyzbrite.com>

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/docbrite/>

The Bundle

George L. Sulea

Ancient and forbidden books were always a central theme in many of Lovecraft's stories: The Pnakotic Manuscripts, Cultes Des Ghouls, and most importantly, The Necronomicon, which has been a central piece of literature for his entire mythos. They always fascinated me, those strange and terrifying tomes just waiting like traps on innocent bookshelves, and after spending a day driving through an old, industrial suburb in Cleveland, a story idea hit me, which eventually led to what you see before you. One thing, when you go to that "cute little bookshop" in your neighborhood, remember: buyer beware.

My brother Jason found it. He was always good at finding trouble.

He stumbled into my coffee shop on Main one fall afternoon as we were cleaning up from a lunch rush, all sweaty and huffing like he'd run a marathon and clutching an odd bundle to his chest. Terri, my counter help, gave me a sly look and rolled her eyes as he hurried past, then went back to making a double espresso for a patron.

Both of us knew that Jason loved his melodrama and because of his predilection for the strange, he'd most likely come to try to sell me on some new theory or old some red herring that he'd discovered, always knowing I'd listen. Mom and Dad never understood his obsessions, which hadn't changed much from childhood all the way right through college. Jay had always seen some arcane connection to this or that, trying to be some latter day magician, or as he put it "arcane explorer." In spite of this, while trying to be the supportive, responsible older brother, I just tried to humor him most of the time while attempting to steer him away from any real trouble.

What most people never suspected was how much my brother and I were really alike. I had a streak of weirdness in me as well. I loved stories of the odd or macabre, but I just buried it deeper. Secretly, I really *enjoyed* my brother's ramblings, wishing I could join him sometimes in his weird explorations.

Most recently Jay had been telling me how deeply he was getting into the work of a mutual addiction of ours, the author H.P. Lovecraft. Jay was convinced of some deep connection between Lovecraft and occult lore than

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went beyond his fantastic stories of alien beings and dark, shadowy places of ancient evil. Many of the author's fans, like my brother, saw the weird author as more than just a visionary of his time, turning the horror writer into some kind of doomsday prophet, or a priest of a religion older than time.

I wrung my hands dry after killing off another load of dishes and looked Jay up and down.

"Jay, what the hell's wrong, you look like somebody's chasing you," I said, mildly alarmed at the red, puffy look of him. Jason had never been what you would call athletic; now, his short, slightly pudgy frame was heaving with deep, violent breaths. His black hair was mussed and greasy looking from the sweat pouring down his face, and his white button down shirt, standard nerd wear for my brother, was drenched.

He kept pushing his heavy rimmed glasses back up on his face constantly as they slid loosely down his nose. "Alex, you've got to see this! I just got it today I nearly ran here all the way from the University. You've got to check this out!" He held the parcel out at me from across the counter as if it were some grail.

It was wrapped in a plain, tan parcel paper that looked very old, tied with twine, for all appearances, nothing more than an ordinary package, but the life of me, I thought I could see something *moving* just below the paper. Can't be, I thought, I've been drinking too much of my own product again. I did a double take, and the ripples seemed to vanish.

I asked Terri to tend the counter and guided Jay to the back of the coffee house so we could have some privacy. We slid into an old wooden booth and Jay, looking like he'd scored a winning lottery ticket, set the book down reverently on the table in front of me, sliding it forward a bit. I stared at it for just a moment, the afternoon shadows coming through the window playing across the plain paper, causing spidery images to trip across its surface. I was not sure what was inside, but I knew that I didn't like it. Now, I think that some ancient sense, deep in the animal part of my mind, was reacting slowly, painfully.

Jay looked up at me, licking his lips, and began. "Alex, I found it, an actual copy!" He said as he lay his hand on the bundle.

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"Refresh my memory bro, a copy of *what* exactly?" I said, shrugging my shoulders.

He sat back with surprise, "Jeez man, don't you remember when I called you last week. I had a lead on some of those old Lovecraft books, remember?"

I vaguely recalled him calling me a few days previously, jabbering about something concerning books, but the details escaped me now.

"Yeah, I think I remember," I lied, "but if this some old copy of 'At the Mountains of Madness' or something, couldn't it wait till later, I've got to get back to ..."

He slammed his hands flat on table, startling me. "Alex, this isn't just any book," he pushed it towards me a little more. "This is *the* book!"

Jay's green eyes were wide like a little piece of madness slipped into him; I shrugged, still not quite getting it and beginning to get more than a little annoyed at him.

Jay loved his drama, so I decided to humor him. I picked up the book and was surprised by how...warm the cover felt. The covering below the paper had a spongy give, that and the books size reminded of those old thickly covered high-school yearbooks or photo albums I remembered from when I was a kid. As I tore away the paper and twine, I stared at the ancient looking thing.

The outside of the book was of some deep, brownish leather, the shade varying from dark brown to tan. It felt smooth and soft with a familiar texture that I couldn't place, but as I ran my hand over it, I was both uneasy and fascinated. Inscribed all over the outside, in different patterns, lines and whorls, were dozens of strange symbols in a language I didn't recognize that seemed to drawn in some deep, brownish red ink that glistened like it was still wet, even though, as I ran my hand over it, my fingers came away dry.

On the spine and cover were other words, inscribed in faded letters of gold over the strange symbols, that I vaguely realized was Arabic. The most conspicuous thing about the volume was a white cotton strap across the width of the book's midsection, about three inches wide, covered in more of the ancient symbols. At it's center on the front cover of the book was a

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glyph that I'd seen in an old illustration in a horror novel; a star with curved limbs with a flaming eye at its center, all in deep, red ink.

The famous Elder sign of protection, described in a dozen different Lovecraft stories by a myriad of authors.

A sign created to hold evil back.

I turned the book over in my hands, examining the cotton strap and I realized that it was one single piece, no threads or seams at all.

"Okay," I said, scratching my head, "it's really cool Jay, but since I'm not the ancient language expert here," I pointed to the indecipherable name on the cover and gave Jay a puzzled look. He snatched it out of my hands, seeming more agitated now, as if my touching it sullied it somehow.

"Sorry, I forgot not everyone reads Arabic." He said, holding the book out in front of him for a moment, before setting the book down flat on the table again with exaggerated care that had an uncomfortable reverence to it. He smoothed his damp hair back, looking me in the eye.

"Alex, you know how they always talked about all those weird old mystical texts in all the Lovecraft stories, right?"

I nodded. "Sure, I remember, I even have some paperback knockoff of the *Necronomicon* at home, but from what I remember all those are just made up. What is this, some special collector's edition or copy?"

Alex smiled wide and said, "*Most* of them were made up, or so I found out. Thanks to a good bit of searching, I made a hell of a find." He pointed to the book again, "Alex, this is no knockoff, it's a copy of Al Azif, the *real* thing, the real *Necronomicon*, in the original Arabic!"

I sat back and ran my hands over my shaved scalp, the skeptic in me looming large. Despite my feelings, I'd always read that the book wasn't real. It couldn't be.

"Jay, I can't believe you'd fall for that. You know that Lovecraft made up the *Necronomicon*, he as much as said so. It doesn't exist! This is probably just somebody's idea of a joke, I mean the craftsmanship isn't bad, but maybe it's just some showpiece made by somebody who wanted to make a couple of bucks off of a gullible collector."

My last words stung him. Jay had fallen for some fast ones in the past, and he had an apartment full of "memorabilia" to remind him of some of his mistakes; he trusted people too easy, and in some way, I think, he

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wanted too much too cheaply...and too often. This time though, I should have watched what I said. I realized my error too late; I'd lit his short fuse.

He exploded. "Alex, just because I'm not an 'expert businessman' like you, doesn't mean I don't know what I'm doing. I've seen plenty of fakes and forgeries; this, *dear brother* isn't one of them!" At that, he reached for the spine of the book, sliding his fingers under the white cotton wrapping.

"Jay, what're you doing man," I realized what he was doing and some piece of me felt like screaming at him. I'd admitted my skepticism, but now, looking at the old, withered book, I felt something deep; that same animal, gnawing anxiety that rested within those yellowed pages.

"Well, since you believe this is a forgery, then nothing will happen, right?" He tore at the binding and in one motion, ripped it free. The band came away with pop, which seemed to echo in my head like a pistol shot. In my bones, I felt something vibrate, like the sound of some ancient invisible door breaking through centuries of decay.

Even though it was mid-afternoon, the coffee shop seemed to darken, like the sky had become overcast by some premature night. As we were indoors, I realized that the lights in the shop, even the *air* itself seemed to fade a bit. I think now, the deed being done, we both realized that Jay had made a mistake. He stood immobile, staring down at the white cotton band still clutched in his hand. The world seemed to shift and I could swear as I looked down at the book, the symbols on it's cover became sharper, clearer as if the life sucked from the place had gone into the wicked thing to revitalize it. I swear, even my heart felt like a weight sat on it for that first, horrible moment.

Just as quickly as it came, the pall left the place and we both sat there, looking at each other, not knowing what to say. He dropped the band on the floor, then grabbed the book and ran for the door like a scared rabbit.

I chased after him, out the door and into the street. I was still trying to wrap my mind around what had happened; had we been hallucinating? Traffic was heavy, and the smell of exhaust made the air seem foul.

"Jay," I called to him, "I didn't mean to piss you off man but something's not right here, you saw what just happened back there," He spun and glowered at me, the book clutched to his chest.

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I had my hands up, trying to calm him and bring some bit of reason back. "Listen, if that is what you think it is," I motioned toward the book, "then maybe you should get rid of it, if it's really the Necronomicon, it's nothing to fool with." I was making excuses, playing along with his logic, but I knew he needed to get away from the book, especially if the stories were true.

"Where did you get it from, anyway?" I said.

He seemed to calm down for a moment, his face clearing, and he looked down at his feet, then back at me. His face was the same one I'd seen a hundred times when we were kids, full of apology and confusion.

"I got it from a rare bookstore on East 117th, a place called Grovny's." He said finally.

"Grovny's?" Then, a memory slithered into my mind.

A shiver passed through me. "That's the place over by the old neighborhood where we grew up, right? Isn't that the old guy who used to scare the hell out of all of us when we were kids?"

He nodded. "That's the one, but Alex, that was a long time ago. We were just kids man, I realize now that old guy's really cool. He imports all kinds of rare books and ... Alex, I *know* he wouldn't cheat me. He worked really hard to get me the book, and says knows it's authentic."

His assurance of old Grovny's honesty didn't make me feel any better.

As boys, we'd avoided the old man's place like the plague after hearing stories of strange sounds at night near his dark bookshop and half-whispered rumors from the superstitious old folk in our neighborhood about the devil himself walking between the stacks of dusty old books, waiting for unwary kids to stray by. Despite that, the shop had remained for our whole childhood a fearful thing, like a wisp of the boogieman hiding in a dark corner.

"Listen," I said, "just to be safe, don't do anything ... crazy with the book yet, until we you know if it's authentic or not, okay?"

He cocked his head at me. "Don't tell me now *you're* getting superstitious Alex?"

"Just humor me, besides, I don't want anything to happen to my favorite brother, do I?" I smiled at him. "I'm your *only* brother, or had you forgotten." He smiled back at me as his anger slipped away, "I'd

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better get back to work, I'll call you a couple of days, after I check out a few things about the book." I was surprised at him, as he seemed to forget what happened inside the shop, but then, I was questioning my own mind. Was it just some kind of hallucination?

As I hugged my brother close, I got really scared for him as I felt that hideous thing he held between us pulse with some ... feeling, like anger or worse. Did my compassion for my brother awaken some ancient resentment deep in the pages of the book? Jay turned quickly and left to head for the rapid train, the eerie tome under his arm, cradled with the safety that a child gives to some cherished object.

Jay slowly disappeared up the sunlit afternoon street that was dappled in shadow, but as he dwindled into the distance, I couldn't help but feel that something bad, something dark was dogging his heels. I turned to go back inside the coffee shop as the sky blackened with dark rain clouds rising in the distance.

Ever since Jay and I we were kids, anything scary had been a real release for the both of us. I still remember the times when we would hide under the covers, too wired to sleep, pouring over copies of *Haunt of Fear* or *Creepy* magazine with our flashlights until all hours of the night until mom busted us and took our treasured comics away, telling us how it would give us nightmares. We laughed after she left the room, being brave and saying how we weren't afraid of anything. I remember those nights though, falling into fitful slumbers full of monsters, dark rooms and half remembered shapes, waking up both exhilarated and terrified as kids sometimes do, looking under my bed, just to be safe.

Now the nightmares had come back, but there was no exhilaration. Just cold stark fear.

I hadn't slept well since Jay had brought the book to the store, my dreams full of huge, looming shapes and rooms full of blood that flowed into a brightly lit chasm, its edges covered with arcane symbols. All the time, the air was filled with anguished screams and pleas. I saw my

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terrified brother being pulled into dark recesses by huge, misshapen hands and awoke in cold sweats, my throat raw from screaming.

Jay had a tendency to disappear every once and a while, turning up after a few days with a pile of new books or papers on some new find of his, but this time my intuition, coupled with the worsening dreams, made me get more nervous by the day.

One afternoon, while sitting at a back booth in the coffee shop trying to get my head together, my concern and curiosity finally got the best of me. I grabbed the phone and dialed Jay's place. After it rang a couple of times, the receiver clicked and I heard a noise on the other end, like an empty echo inside a cavern; a low thrum that throbbed in the earpiece of the phone.

"Hello?" I said. Nothing.

I knew Jay had an answering machine so the deafening silence on the other end of the line had me perplexed. I hung up and tried again. More of the same. A click then an empty stretch of silence on the other end of the line. It felt like someone was listening, like that silence was alive with some intelligence that waited on the phone. I dismissed my fear, reasoning that the machine might be broken, just picking up and leaving the line dead, but I still got scared. I called his office at the university language department, and the secretary answered.

"Moorham University Language department, can I help you?" She said in a nasal voice.

"Yes, I'm trying to get a hold of my brother, Jason Treyham, could you patch me through to his office please,"

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Treyham hasn't come in today, as a matter of fact, he's been out for quite a while now. We were wondering about him."

My throat tightened. I put my hand over the receiver for a second, trying to steady myself.

"When was the last time he was in ma'am?" I asked.

"Let me see," I heard a rustling of paper, "that would have been last Tuesday,"

The day he got the book.

I hung up the phone abruptly, told Terri to watch the store and ran for my car. Reaching in my pocket for my keys, I felt something soft and

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pulled out the strip of torn cloth that had bound the book. The eye seemed to stare at me from the center of the star as my mind went back to the dreams, Jay screaming, the blood flowing in rivers across the floor ...

When I pulled up in front of Jay's building, I saw that the windows of his apartment were dark, the drapes pulled and a deep blackness beyond. I went inside of the brownstone and rang the bell in the main hall, but no one answered. I used the spare key that Jay had given me for emergencies and headed up the steps to the top floor. As I reached the turn at the top floor, I saw that the hallway was dark. Shadowy forms seemed to stick to the walls like spiders in wait.

I flicked the wall switch at the bottom of the steps and the flicker of the bulb chased the shadows from the corners of the hall. More of my imagination. I felt like kicking myself for my childishness.

I pounded on the door. "Jay, you in there, it's Alex," I heard nothing from inside the apartment, so I reached down to unlock the door...and drew my hand back quickly.

The knob and lock were ice cold. I realized now that the air too, had grown chilly, and strangely, I could now even see my breath. I quickly unlocked the door and swung it open slowly. I could make out the vague outlines of indistinct shapes that sat all around, menacing me with their mystery. As I moved a little further in, a strong odor hit me. It was a decayed smell, like old leaves and basement must, combined with the strong odor of candle wax. I stopped as I heard what seemed to be the very slight sound of breathing coming from somewhere in the room.

I flicked on the light switch by the door and staggered back as the place was revealed to me.

The apartment was a shambles. The edges of the room were covered in the refuse of dozens of shredded books and piles of papers, now minced like confetti and littering the furniture, shelves and even sticking to the walls. A pile of carpet and under-padding, ripped and uprooted, sat in the corner, revealing a large expanse of the apartment's hardwood flooring. In the center of the carnage was the disheveled form of my brother. He lay in the center of a huge pentagram, inscribed on the wooden floorboards with chalk; at each point of the star were huge, black candles that had melted

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down to the floorboards. The symbols surrounding the entire device, as large as a man's torso, were the same ones from the cover of the cursed book.

I panicked. "Jay, are you all right ... Jay!!" He didn't move.

I ran over and grabbed his body, turning him over. The first thing I noticed was that I grabbed more clothes than flesh. As he turned to face me, I saw why.

Jay was emaciated, a shell of himself. His body felt light and brittle, like an old man and his face, once round and full, was sunken and hollow like a corpse. As I cradled him for what seemed forever, his head in my lap, I saw that cursed book was clutched in Jay's now skeletal hand, gripped by his bony fingers like a vise. I could hear his labored breathing as his body trembled slightly with each breath. Thank God, at least he was still alive. To my relief, as I looked down into his face, I saw his eyelids flutter and his green eyes, once bright, now looked up at me in a milky haze.

"A-Alex," His voice was a hoarse whisper.

"I'm here," I looked down into his face, my vision tearing up. He was so fragile, my little brother, and all I could do was hold him.

"H-he wouldn't take it back," He managed.

"Who Jay, who wouldn't take it back?"

"Groovy, he wouldn't take the book back. I—I tried to get him to, but he said *it* wasn't done with me yet." Jay's breathing got raspier, heavier and strained. "He told me that now that it was opened, I had to deal with the consequences myself. I—I tried, did spells, tried to push it back down, to hold back the hunger, but the book, it wants *everything* from you ... everything."

"D-don't worry little brother, we'll fix it, we'll make it right, I promise you, we'll ..." I stroked a strand of wispy black hair out of his face, trying to think of what to do. I felt like I'd abandoned him when he needed me. Guilt tore at me as the evil book throbbed in glee.

Jay tried to manage a smile, blinked once, and said, "You were right, I'm sorry ..." As his eyes glazed over, then closed, I heard a sound like dry sticks being crushed underfoot. My brother's body, in one swift cascade, began to turn a sandy, dry color that spread in seconds all across his withered form. Then, like a shattered hourglass, he crumbled and burst into a cloud of dust, his clothes collapsing into a shroud.

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I threw myself back for a moment, stunned, and watched the dry residue that had been my brother coat the floor like so much smoke; one moment, he was there, then, gone as if he never was.

I sat on the edge of the pentagram like a child, tears flowing down my face, mixing with the dust. I felt something by my hand on the floor, and realized that Jay's glasses were there, the black plastic frames bent and one lens shattered. I looked at them for a second, then gently folded them and held them to my chest. The only pure thing left of him.

Then I heard it.

A low thrum and a light vibration in the floor, like the sound I'd heard on the phone. It came from the book. The cover now looked new and the symbols literally pulsed with life, a force I knew had been stolen from my brother. I snarled and reached for it, thinking to burn it or hurt it in some way, but something stopped me. I realized that it felt pleasure at my brother's death, the kind of vicious happiness that a hunter gets from a kill, or a killer from the anguish of a victim. I knew that if I picked it up, and saw what was within, it would take me too.

I thought of Grovny's words to Jay and I knew what I had to do.

I reached in my pocket and pulled out the cotton band that had held the book in check. As I moved over to it, the book actually skittered across the floor to the far edge of the pentagram like a rat, stirring up the dust as it went. After seeing Jay's death, it didn't so much surprise me as make perfect sense. I realized that the damned thing had not been found by the old man, but was given to my poor brother deliberately. Just as it had been in all the old stories, the book was the bait at the end of a hook for the unwary to take, and then be taken in turn. I moved cautiously for a second, then pounced on the book, holding it to floor, making sure to keep the cover closed. I managed to get the band back around it, and as I did, the book seemed to calm, going dormant once again.

I reached for my belt, to tie it around the book to re-secure the band, when I got yet another shock; I watched in amazement as the tear in the fabric knitted back together and the band instantly became one unbroken piece again! It seemed that whatever force had created it had prepared for the eventuality. I thought, to my sadness, that if my brother had only kept the piece of cloth, he might not have ended up being the book's victim. I

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looked down one last time at the pile of clothing and dust, then ran from the building with the tome in tow. I knew that no one, no matter how open minded would believe my story, and I realized what I had to do.

Despite it's evil, I knew that the book was not the real cause of Jay's death.

It was Grovny who had lured my brother in, and it was him I'd settle with, once and for all.

Grovny's store was nested in the old Slovak neighborhoods in the north end of town, the place where Jay and I had spent most of our formative years. Coming back this way was full of memories of sun lit afternoons in Ardmore Park, looking for bugs and treasures behind bushes and under rocks, racing our bikes along the winding back streets and summers that seemed to go on forever. Now, as I looked again, I could see that those memories would never be whole again, and with adult eyes, saw a taint that, as a boy, was invisible to me.

The section had originally been the American dream for people wanting to find cheap housing close to the factories and mills in the 1950's. The streets were lined with old cookie-cutter ranch-style homes, complete with tiny postage stamp lawns and gated, wire-fenced yards that were festooned with chipped, ceramic garden gnomes and flailing, gaudily painted wooden pinwheels and flotsam, all semi-hidden amidst the sparse shrubbery. I knew it was an attempt to add a cheerful air to the decaying area now inhabited mainly by old age pensioners whose numbers dwindled every year. All it did was make it seem worse.

The old houses and winding streets were so closely packed together that everyone knew everyone else's business, but even as children, we'd heard whispers of things behind closed doors that even the adults didn't want to talk about. This was the place that my brother and I had grown up in, knowing neighborhood block parties, long church services, and listening to stories told to us by the old folks about ghosts and old world superstitions. I really thought that the proper fear of the old people in this place was caused Jay and I to become obsessed with the darker things; now, I realized that the childhood fancies, seeming so innocent, were all

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too real. Innocent days faded as I walked down the main drag, seeing how much things had changed, and seeing, *really* seeing just how the place was.

A dark pall hung over the neighborhood now; a dirty cloud that clung to the streets and alleys. The sun only shown in pulsating slivers as gathering storm clouds hung in the sky like dark cells of some cancerous mass, ready to burst.

Just beyond the main divide cut by tracks leading to the old rail yard was the business district.

I walked down the dusty streets, the road maps of my memory overlapping the place. I remembered the butcher's shop on the corner that had been run by old, smiling Mr. Dubrovnic; it was now a cheap, gaudy tanning spa, the windows covered in fluorescent advertisements; a corner mini-mart, a refuge that had always been a great place to toss away a few coins on candy or our most holy horror comics was now covered in iron bars and signs advertising cheap cigarettes and cheaper beer. I saw dirty, ragged children with haunted faces playing on a side street, chasing some small animal into an alley and girls, whom I guessed at around thirteen or fourteen, dressed far too maturely for their age cruising the street like a hungry pack of animals. The buildings were like dark caves where the older residents must have been hiding; occasionally I saw the quick glimmer of a face or the swish of a drape as I walked down to Main, the evil book tucked under my arm. The place had gone to seed in the worst way and as I rounded a corner, in the center of the decay, sat Grovny's.

The building stood as it always had; dark gray stone walls with shadowy recessed windows that were framed by heavy faded purple drapes. Old man Grovny had lived upstairs, his shop inhabiting the ground floor. I remember that, as a child, I'd thought the place seemed timeless; it had always been here, unchanged to everyone's recollection, and now, realizing what must be waiting inside, I shuddered as I walked up the thick stone steps, trying to prepare myself for what was ahead. As I reached for the doorbell, the door swung open with a loud squeak and I fell back a step, startled.

"I knew you would come, Mr. Treyham," There stood old Grovny, his face a wizened mask of lines and sunken flesh, his hair a white frayed halo

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around his mottled scalp. The corner of his mouth was raised, like a dry smirk, and his ice-blue eyes glittered in sunken, recessed sockets. What amazed me, as I stood there unable to speak like a stunned child, was that even though he looked old, he didn't look *older*, as if his age had stayed static all these years, his short frame and simple clothing looking the same as it always had.

"So, come in," he motioned back into the dark recesses of the book shop, "you must have many questions, no?"

I followed the old man as he shuffled back into his shop. The walls were covered with rows of weathered books stacked at odd angles on dark, wooden shelves and the place had a musty, stagnant smell, as if no one, save for the old man, had been there in a very long time.

He made his way into what must have originally been the living room and settled behind a huge oak desk whose surface was covered with piles of yellowed paper and more books. The room was literally covered with shelves, no spaces, no pictures; books and shelving even covered the windows. What little light existed was from the aged fixtures that glowed with a feeble, yellow light.

He steepled his fingers, and motioned for me to sit. As I did, he began.

"I see you have brought back what was mine ..." He motioned towards the book that I now had clutched on my lap.

"Yours," I said. "My brother said he bought this from you," I gripped the book tighter, "and now, he's dead. I know this damn thing is responsible, and so are *you!*"

Grovny's mouth curved up into a smile. "Yes, it is true the book drew the very life from him, but do not blame me, I told him of the risks and like many others all he wanted was the paltry notoriety of owning it, of trying to control it. He, as with all foolish egotists, did not think of the consequences, the true *meaning* of the book's secrets, even after I warned him."

At first, I was stunned at his admission. Then, I was angry. "You lie!" I stood, dropping the book to the floor. "Jay was an innocent, and you took advantage of that. You took everything he had, that ... thing, took everything he was," Tears hazed my vision as I stared at the old man, who sat unmoved and unmoving.

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Then Grovny stood, leaning over the desk at me. "Ahh, Mr. Treyham, I see you are as foolish as your brother," He smiled at me again, this time a toothy grin that revealed rows of yellow-black teeth. "He thought the risks of waking the Old Gods were a myth, like the stories you read in childhood, and the fool, like other fools, refused to listen. Now, like so many others, his soul has found a place with the foolish *damned*," He pointed to the book, and as I looked at it on the floor, the cover shifted like the surface of a rippling lake, and there, for a split second, was the tortured face of my brother.

Rage grabbed my heart and I snarled at the old man. "Damn you! Why did you do this?"

"Because, Mr. Treyham, I have *always* done what my masters have demanded of me. I gave the inspiration to the author, Lovecraft, so that others would know—so that others would *search*—and when they came, I gave them the honeyed trap of knowledge, so easy to fall into for you foolish children, knowing that their stupidity and greed would add them to the sacrifice that is my master's constant demand, ever since I, too, gave up my soul for secrets that you hold in your hand."

It took me a moment, but as I took in his words, the shock of it hit me.

"You're him, aren't you," I said.

Grovny bowed with a flourish. "Yes, young man, you are the first in a very long time to, how do you say, get it?"

As he grinned at me again with those hideous teeth, I understood now why Grovny knew so much about the forbidden books, the ancient evils, for as I looked at the man, I started to see the darkness of his features, the angle of his jaw, the age in his eyes, and realized that the man I was looking at was, in fact, Abdul Alharazed, the Mad Arab himself.

"B-but, you're dead. They said you were killed by some demon or something in the old stories." I felt my face go flush and my stomach tighten.

"Heh, a convenient lie, my friend. You shouldn't believe everything you read. No, It was not I who died that day, but the first in a long line of fools who fell victim to that," He pointed again at the book.

"Ahh, but you still do not believe, do you?" He shook his head. "I have walked the sands of this world since before you were born, I have

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influenced the courts of kings and the armies of man. I have known tortures beyond hell, but as you still are skeptical, let me show what the Old Ones have given me in return for my loyalty." With a single motion, he grabbed the edge of the desk and, with no seeming effort, flipped the huge object away like a feather, causing it to smash against the far wall and scattering books and papers in a shower of debris. I fell back, grabbing the book from the floor as I ran for the door. The old man gestured, and a set of huge bookcases slid away from their resting places by the window and blocked the doorway, one of them knocking me aside.

I fell to the floor, the book still clutched in my hand, and skittered backwards as Alharazed looked on, still smiling.

He walked forward, stomping across the floor like a juggernaut, crushing books and papers underfoot.

"Now, my young friend, give me my book and I may let your pain be brief, unlike your brother, who will suffer in Cthulhu's belly for eternity." He continued forward, his outstretched hand pulling at my soul. I felt like a child again, the fear of the dark tearing at me. I wanted to scream, but I was the adult now and I knew monsters were *real*.

In that moment, I'm not sure how, I felt something inside me twist. I thought of my brother and of the nameless numbers of souls who must have been drawn by the pages of the book ...

I couldn't let it happen again.

"You want this," I held the book out like a shield, struggling to my feet, "then here, you son of a bitch, take it!"

I swung the book with everything I had. Grovny held up a hand to stop me but missed as the arc of my swing struck him square in the temple. He reeled and lashed out at me, knocking me flying across the floor into the opposite wall. I shook my head groggily and looked up, expecting him to be looming over me, ready to take my soul.

He was not there.

He staggered, and as he took his hand away from his face, besides the look of utter surprise, I realized that his skull had caved in at the spot where I'd hit him. A fine, bluish light was escaping from the hole, like a strobe in the dark. At the same time, I became aware of a breeze *inside* the house! Grovny/Alharazed began holding his head, trying to cover the

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growing rent in his skull. As I watched, the crack in his head grew larger, and the old man's face began to fragment. He screamed a stream of incoherent syllables in some twisted prayer to his gods, falling to his knees as a whirlwind of paper and debris flew around the room, surrounding him tornado like as the air in the room spun and tore at the walls. Books came flying off of the shelves, pummeling the old man as his body began to crack like a broken stained glass window, the forces in him pulling him apart.

As I stared into the maelstrom, I could see in the light a blob of darkness, and within that a face whose deep crimson eyes chilled me to the core. Grovny continued to scream, but it seemed like nothing as it mixed with the growing howl of the wind.

"Go," I heard the voice in my head. It was Jay's voice, calling to me, calmly guiding me. I looked back and in the empty space, once held by one of the now smashed old book cases, was a window.

The building began to shake. I glanced back, and Grovny was no longer Grovny. He was a twisted creature made of sinew and dark flesh, a beast's face appearing as the torn remnant of the old man's features finally fell away.

"You think this is the end!" snarled the beast. "There are other books, foolish one, and other weak souls to desire them!"

The room began to fold in on itself; the walls buckling as the force that tore at the evil being began to tear the house apart, sucking him into the center of the storm. I threw myself towards the window, flying out into the street and hitting it like a sack of meat in a shower of glass. I struggled to rise from the floor, my head feeling warm and sticky with blood as I crawled away from the destruction. The house was cracking, collapsing in on itself. The old stone screamed and I finally got up and ran, hearing the sound of the vortex growing larger, hungrier. As I stumbled and fell to the other side of the street, the house imploded in a blast of blue-black light the sound of screaming souls.

At that, the world blissfully winked out, and I sank in an ocean of blackness.

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The house is gone.

I told the police I wasn't sure what happened. They reasoned a gas explosion or some freak sinkhole caused the massive crater where the building stood, not a brick or stone left. They never did explain how none of the other buildings next door were affected, or how witnesses said they saw Grovny's place vanish, imploding into nothingness, a scream of anger radiating from a rent in the very air. I'm still not sure what saved me. I think at that last moment, maybe my brother's soul was released. maybe he's finally at rest.

The dead have it easy.

I live above the coffee shop now, talking, listening, tending my business and secretly hunting. I search the net and travel when I can, looking for other copies of the book or ones like it, trying to save any more of the unwary from Alharazed's curse.

I made the mistake of not believing once, but now at night the when walls scream at me and the face of my brother crumbles from my memory like desert sand, I wake and search some more, and somewhere, I know, a little wizened man is putting out a sign, as he opens up his doors to the unwary.

THE END

George L. Sulea is a 36 year old, very happily married N.E. Ohio Fan/Writer/Lover of the Strange who is always fascinated by new and old ideas and especially the hidden, inner workings of life, which play a large role in his stories. In between his time as an EMS/911 dispatcher (which provides a lot of interesting material,) he writes, games, and is generally a nerd, albeit a happy one.

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Terror In Dunwich

(Featuring Erik Bedlam)

Steven L. Shrewsbury & Peter J. Welmerink

Terror In Dunwich is one of the tales in the *Bedlam Unleashed* canon. Though Peter and Steven are great lovers of Howard, Leiber, and Wagner, admiration for H.P. Lovecraft showed through in this tale. Steven relates, "While the series of tales in *Bedlam Unleashed* chronicles the Norse mercenaries as they travel down the British coast in 1014, I saw Dunwich on the map ... and the story sort of just wrote itself."

***"Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."* —John F. Kennedy**

After freeing Kendrick, the Oracle of Odin, from the vampire Princess Wenda in Leftwich, Norse mercenary Alanis Johansson and berserker Erik Bedlam journey farther down the English coast toward the town of Dunwich, still in search of a way back home. Though a frequent target of Viking attacks, Dunwich may not prove to be the means of escape they anticipated...

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TESTIMONY OF BROTHER ONSLOW AT ELY

Prior Andrew has suggested that I copy this account of the events in Dunwich as a means of further embracing the grace of God. As if writing down the dark happenings, reliving the stygian horrors of Dunwich will make it depart my sorrowful mind. Andrew is my mentor and the abbot agrees with his words. I must comply and follow the rule of Saint Benedict, thus further tying me to my risen Lord and not the terror from the sea.

The chamber of the monastery where I am putting this to parchment is cozy and warm, unlike many rooms of the church ground. The monks who dutifully duplicate the word of God are well taken care of. Just off this series of quarters is the blacksmith's shop. Brother Simon is stoking the forge and I hear his songs. That brawny man was a smith before he took up the cross. He serves the Lord in simpler ways than most. Making certain

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the horses are well shod is a straightforward task compared to the one he will have to perform later today—removing the Thunder God from my heart.

I must not get ahead of myself. The terrible events of Dunwich are boiling in my head and the year of my novice time is nearly accomplished. Let me make this formal confession or profession of the events in Dunwich and reflect on them no more—as if that is possible. Some say this is a science of telling troubles of the mind to relieve them. If only this were so.

Never in my life was I considered a bad man. Always learning my verses, I was a good member of mother Church and Saint Jude watched over me. I took on the patron Saint of the oppressed because I was born just outside of Dunwich. That hamlet on the coast of Britain held a fascinating history. The part of the account I lived in Dunwich will be chronicled here. The part of history I grew up with was one of frequent raids and attacks from the accursed Norsemen, or Vikings as many call them.

The blonde and red-haired giants sailed out of the north and from across the sea to attack us. All manner of defenses proved worthless. There was no repelling or fighting them. As soon as the town would die and folks would refuse to rebuild, the Norsemen never came back. However, when new folk settled in, the town arose from the ashes and the populace grew hearty, the Norse returned. Why? Again, we had something to pilfer. I have heard tell Dunwich is rising yet again, but I must tell my account.

In the time when the Dane Svein Forkbeard ruled in Britain, many of the Viking raids stopped near Dunwich. Either they were elsewhere or they decided the land was picked clean. It was in these years that the bad men of Dunwich made their sinister deal. At the death of Svein Haraldsson, the abdicated King Æthelred II would soon return for a brief time. When the son of Svein, Knut Sveinsson, prepared to withdraw from England for a spell, it probably only gave the unregulated raiders further reason to come again. Since the Danes and Swedes rules Norway, there were outlaws aplenty in the sea.

For when all of the good men of a shire are gone, the awful men will take root. Many of these bad men were folk from afar off, not native to our land. Enough of the locals were full of spite and pride, thus would do

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anything to repel the invaders. I also think many were too familiar with the olden ways of Britain's pagan past, thus, they gave in easily, at first. After all, the two requirements of the dark pact were not as terrible to them as they would have dreamed. Words never are enough for there must be sacrifice.

Is there a word for great coincidences? I know it not, but on the morn of the last Viking raid, I was at the periphery of town, weeping over the evil of what my family had become. I detested the fact that my hands had been part of making the darkness embrace our shire. When I looked up and saw the three Norsemen on horseback, I thought the hour of my death had arrived. However, Vikings never rode in to rape and murder on horses.

In my hands was a pitiable cross made from fallen branches. The cross bar clung pathetically in the crook of the branch as I held it to my face and kissed it. The three Norsemen laughed at me. Thinking myself barmy and a dead man, I never ran as they dismounted. All were very tall. One sported long, dirty blonde locks and a more kempt beard. He was muscle bound and strapping, but seemed cautious. His trousers were akin to those worn in Britain and did not fit him well. His boots and tunic were that of a Scotsman. This was not stunning for a Norsemen steals everything.

The men with him perplexed me more. One was nearly as tall as the blonde, but his hair was gray and his beard was flowing as if this man were just released from some prison. Incredibly thin, he wore a lengthy, faded burlap robe of a simple priest, but I am sure by the sword on his hip that he was no man of Jesus Christ. The other man was a giant and gave the horse relief when he slid from its back. This monster was hulking and thick as a tree with mighty limbs like a creature from a child's fairy-tale. His hair was wild and unkempt like his beard, but it was parted in a peculiar manner. I swallowed when I saw the shard of rusted metal sticking out of a puckered wound in his skull. Surely, this man was a creature of the undead. He wore short sword and carried a huge double-bladed axe. Sheathed at his hip was what looked to be a claymore broad-sword.

The blonde man spoke in old English, saying, "Good day, sir." He could unmistakably read my alarm and seemed almost pleased by it. Since they did not kill me right off, I thought then I had a likelihood at life...but woe be unto me—what a life!

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"I am Onslow," I told him. "From hence do you hail?"

"I am Alanis Johansson," the blonde informed me and gestured at the thin, old man and said, "That is Kendrick, son of Prescott." He watched me eyeing the giant for a few moments before saying, "That is Erik Bedlam. We are strangers in your land."

The one called Kendrick spoke up to say, "We came from Leftwich." His voice was weary and full of foreboding.

"Leftwich?" I choked. "That place is accursed!"

The giant gripped his axe. He grinned the smile of a maniac killer, and proclaimed, "It isn't anymore, Briton! Damn their eyes if anyone re-plants that town."

Alanis looked at me and asked, "Why do you blubber out here in the woods, Onslow?"

I must have blurted out something like, "Because I cannot bear to be a part of the terror in Dunwich!"

The men exchanged glances and the crazy looking one mumbled, "Must every town in Britain be mad?"

"What terror is this?" Alanis questioned me, but at that moment, the three raised their heads to look toward the outlying sea. It was as if they had lost their breath at the same time.

"Long-ships," Erik Bedlam gasped, his insane eyes satiated with delight. "Thor is lauded. We are delivered!"

Indeed, when I stood, I too could distinguish the vessels of the Viking raiders as they swiftly came into our port.

Alanis grabbed me by my soiled shirt and turned my face to his. "Is this the terror you speak of? You should have kept running, whelp!"

I wept again and the men looked confused, for I said, "Would that this were all I had to fear. I have sold my soul to the devils of the sea for deliverance from your kindred! I am damned and care no longer for my life."

Kendrick stepped closer to me as Erik appeared ready to run and join their brothers on the water. The older man asked, "What say you of deals with darkness? I sense you are full of madness."

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"We are corrupted! Run for your lives!" I screamed. "Your brethren will never leave our town alive!" The tears came fast and my voice shrilled. "They will be the greatest blood sacrifice to the children of the sea that live in the ruined church. Woe be unto us that took down the cross and bent a knee to these monstrosities!"

"Look, Alanis," Erik said as if enraptured by a true love. "They are spilling from the boats! Our brothers are going to attack these mice. We are saved!"

Kendrick declared to me, "We are not a-feared of your gods, Christ or otherwise. Most gods are the creation of men to make weaker men bend their will."

I wiped tears from my face and replied, "But I have seen one of the sons of the Great Father of the Sea."

Kendrick and Erik laughed at me. Alanis asked, "Where was this?"

I confessed, "It lives in the temple, once used to honor Jesus Christ."

Kendrick pondered my words and said, "I think he really believes this, Alanis. 'Tis true that a singular aura of desolation hangs over this place."

Roughly, Alanis grabbed my arm and pulled me to the crest of the nearby hill. From this angle, we had a clear view of the ample harbor, ports, and hamlet of Dunwich. The Viking boats hit the docks and shore fast as was their habit. The giants emptied out and Erik Bedlam chuckled as if he were watching children play. Alanis and Kendrick scanned the town. I heard Alanis mutter to the older man in a foreign tongue and point at our ruined church. Oh, the edifice still stood, but the cross was no more. The grace of my Lord Jesus Christ was indeed withdrawn from this spot. Never again would his love be meted out here, nor his communion be feasted upon.

"Take them," Bedlam grunted as if he were watching a sporting match. "Take them all! Die, die, *DIE* you pasty bastards!" Truly, Erik would have ran down hill to the men who approached the many buildings in Dunwich had Alanis not barked a sharp word to him. Alanis looked almost fearful of the giant, unsure if the insane man would comply.

Kendrick's brow furrowed and again, he spoke to Alanis in their native dialect. The elder man used both hands to frame the settlement in as if explaining something to his brothers. Bedlam shook his head from side to

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side, still looking like a child in his merriment. Alanis' look grew grim as he stared absorbedly at the town.

The Vikings down in Dunwich gave up a war whoop, calling on their pagan deities to be with them as they smashed in doors to shops and homes. Alanis said to me in English, "Where is everyone?"

I cried hard and said, "Don't you understand it yet? We have all left and this is what the Norsemen will get. This is going to be the day of reckoning for them!"

"Ragnarok?" Erik muttered humorously. "From ones such as you? Never!"

Kendrick folded his arms and tried to point out to Erik, "But look, brother, do you see any resistance?"

The insane Erik watched closely and alleged, "Not a woman defiled nor blood split." He glared at me with eyes of flame and roared, "You are all dogs, for you have fled. That is why you cowered in the forest, you weak woman of a man! You couldn't defend your homes so you ran away?"

I said austerely, "We couldn't preserve our homes, so we made a pact with the devils below."

A towering figure led the invading men and barked orders on the grounds below us. He wore an iron helmet; armor engraved with spirals and carried a gray shield on his forearm. He never unsheathed his blade as he told the men to take the church. As many more Norsemen emerged from the homes, telling of no opposition and an absence of life, we could see the towering leader pause and then stomp toward the church.

Alanis gripped my arm and I saw later that it was bruised so bad I could hardly lift it. "What is going on? What is in that place?"

Then, we heard the shouting start.

It was not a terror like fright, but more of shock. A few men fled the church, running fast, yelling in their language. The tall leader strode slowly out of the church, but never ran.

Suddenly, we all took a breath for the spectacle of the ocean boiling overtook us. It was the swaying of the Viking ship's masts that made us look. Soon, the choppy, bubbling waters were too intriguing to deny our attention. A damnable fishy odor filled our nostrils and never departed.

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When a long ship overturned in the turbulent waters, Bedlam yelled as if a child discovered his pet dead. All of his dreams of returning to his Norse homeland shook on the waters before us.

Praise God that our vision was somewhat limited to what exactly shambled out of the ocean. It was as if the waters became alive, turned gray and took on a nebulous shape in order to step onto the land. A slimy, shifting wave of madness stirred from the water and came ashore. Like a school of fish, this horror crept over the land, gradually at first, forming a crescent arc and moving toward Dunwich.

This was the destiny of the village. The payment for our sacrifices and compliance come due. God damn me that I lived to witness it.

For some reason, I expected some different reality than what occurred next. Any other group would have fled in terror, but these Norse giants seemed to be genuinely stunned, but immediately acquiescent to their fate. Never a one of the invaders turned and ran in the face of a wave of horrors shambling out of the ocean to attack them. The Viking leader snarled commands over the hairy hordes and turned to face the closing semi-circle of flopping, amorphous evil. Steel rose to the sky and with a cry for Odin to get ready to receive them, they attacked the sea creatures first.

As if hearing the call himself, Erik Bedlam held up his axe and claymore sword. It was then I noted Erik's long sword was broken. This never bothered him for he charged from the slope. Alanis almost went after him, but could not stop Erik in his state of *fey*. Indeed, Bedlam ran down to join the fray of slaughter, yet Kendrick seized me.

"You will come with us," he snarled and practically dragged me down to the end of the village. The stench from the sea grew stronger still and waxed the air heavy.

The wall of monstrosities from the sea became clearer as did the intense warfare before us. A few of the beasts summoned from the ocean were almost like men, humanoid in caste, but monsters with great fins and palpating gills. Hideous blasphemies on land, they swung spiky talons at the Vikings. A few Norse giants died soon, but these men of terror adapted quickly. With shield, sword and axe, they waded into their doom. Slicing, slashing, heads flew and fins fell. The inhuman squeals filled the air and

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haunted my dreams until this day. No confession of prayer will ever drum the sounds of the limitless swarm from my brain.

Kendrick seemed incredibly unconcerned with the assault. He directed Alanis toward a series of hay bales at one end of the village. The thin man watched the slaughter and Bedlam disappear into the fray as he reached into his pockets. Rubbing his hands together, Kendrick waved his hands at the hay and it burst into flames! Alanis took his instruction from the older man and inserted a pitchfork into the bale. As the Viking horde took on the overwhelming children of the sea, Alanis jogged to each home or shop, heaving a burning load onto each thatched roof or into the interior.

The blood bath went on, but Kendrick dragged me closer to the church. I recoiled in horror but the older man swung a bony fist, and broke my nose. As he tried to get me to follow on, one of the creatures from the sea slithered around the corner of the church. It was a creature not unlike a man, but gray of skin and with great eyes like a fish. Heaving for air, the creature screamed and stumbled toward Kendrick. The old man never flinched and reached into his dingy robes. He pulled out two long daggers and threw them, end over end, at the monster. These blades struck the beast in the eyes and the monster screeched, but did not die. Alanis emerged from around the church and rammed the pitchfork into the beast's back. The fiend did not fall and the blonde warrior struck again and again. A sickening wet sucking sound came each time the steel tines embedded and withdrew from the creature's putrid flesh. Finally weakened and spewing a disgusting dark ichor upon the soil, the bleating stopped and the horror toppled.

"The battle is lost for our brothers, Kendrick," Alanis spat as he drew his blade and thrust it into the creature, making certain it was dead. "Though the town goes aflame, we will soon be overrun. We must flee or die where we stand!"

Still nonchalant, the older man retrieved his knives from the body of the foul perversion. I looked Kendrick over and said, "You are a wizard."

The slender Norseman looked around at the burning town and smirked. "Why say you this?"

"You are different than the others and the darkness does not scare you."

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As the furor of battle nearly reached the church, Kendrick glared at me and said, "I am many things, Briton."

"Why not use your magic to combat these monsters? I saw you create fire!"

Kendrick gave me a dire smile and said, "Magic is for fools and the unschooled. You have no idea what real power is." He stood tall and looked at the settlement. Indeed, flames were engulfing many of the modest homes. This seemed to stop many of the abominations from advancing farther into the town. That did not matter on the whole, because the invaders were enveloped by the masses, taking the blood of the Norsemen as repayment for our sin.

Alanis pulled me to my feet and said, "What exactly did you give in exchange for these things from the sea coming to your aide? Some pact with a malevolent god? The blood of children? That is the usual thing for you wretches."

I exclaimed, "They weren't even our children! They were only the bastards produced by Norse rapists. Yes, it is true. We sacrificed the blonde babes born our women fathered by the Viking hordes." I motioned at the church.

"What lies inside?" Alanis questioned.

I retorted, "You are such a man, dear Norseman, go in and see. Can you face the child of the ultimate walker in chaos?"

Kendrick smiled. "Splendid! You are coming with us!"

Alanis looked around at the wall of gray matter slowly screeching and receding away from the center of town. The flames of the burnings made those who dwelt in the wet darkness of the ocean shy away. "Where is Erik?" he said to no one, his voice trailing off. His dour face told me the enormous Norse man, berserk in his bloodlust to join the other Norse killers, had sealed his fortune.

"Inside," Kendrick motioned us toward the church door.

"No!" I wailed like a terrified child. This action seemed to make Alanis afire, and his own trepidation of what made his brothers afraid within was quelled to make me face what I refused to acknowledge.

"Come," Alanis growled. "I would see the god you put in the place of this Christ."

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Once inside the church, the fierce motions and words ceased. The sounds of the burning crackled in our ears as the stench in the church became overpowering.

Since the Vikings bashed in the shutters, sunlight bathed the interior of the building. Many of the benches were cleared away; making a strange sight at the middle of the church as it was now the altar. The benches spread out from the center. A deep octagon hole gaped in the center of the floor. Water filled this outlet and bubbles coiled around in a green fluid. Kendrick advanced and Alanis gave him a warning in his Norse tongue. Still the old one moved closer.

Alanis kept looking out into the burning town, probably scanning the area for his hirsute friend. The wall of gibbering horrors had receded and left no Vikings in its wake. I saw no bodies, no blood or weapon to show that the Norsemen had ever been in Dunwich.

Kendrick pointed at the pool and asked no one, "From hence does this water come?" Then it was as if the answer dawned on him. "Alanis," he said knowingly. "It is clear that a line or tunnel under the ground feeds this puddle from the sea. I can smell the saltwater, not just from the ocean, but from this spot."

"Acht!" Alanis cursed. "Get away from that pool! This entire town is salt encrusted."

I soiled myself at that moment, for the terror of Dunwich arose out of the consortium and knocked Kendrick flat on his buttocks. All of my weeping and imploring the father beyond the sea would not stop this torrid reality from unfolding. How can one describe a thing that should never be?

Truly, this was a creature birthed in the depths of the ocean, probably from one of the Elder Gods ... some fallen spirit of the sky...and my broken mind could only put on it a confused series of animals or creatures that reminded me of it. That is the only way I could make sense of it all.

Towering above the gigantic Norsemen, the creature was twice as tall as any man, but bore a peculiar humanoid upper torso. Its stomach, chest and arms were shaped like a man—well, like a man sporting the arms of a praying mantis, long and clawed at the end. The skin was of deep ocean hues—deep indigo, mottled green and wet ebony—and gleamed in the smoky daylight filtering through the windows. The head was a hideous,

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toad-like monstrosity with insectoid eyes and a tongue like a snake. The darting tongue let loose and a series of gurgling echoes emitted from its wide maw. The thin-lipped mouth shone full of pointy fangs, teeth a sickly dank yellow in the afterglow. The lower portion of the monster was coiling, but in time unraveled, not unlike a serpent, but having a series of sharp fins.

Alanis reared his sword back as the beast looked at Kendrick. The wizard blinked in astonishment, but seemed reconciled to his destiny. The long tongue of the creature shot out of the maw like a frog and wrapped around Kendrick's left arm. With a wrench, I heard the limb dislocate. The wizard was yanked close to the fanged mouth of the son of the deep.

Indeed, Kendrick would have been chewed open if not for the fast moves of Alanis. The lean Norseman jumped over the benches and slashed with his sword. The blade cleaved the tongue apart and Kendrick fell back to the floor of the church, near the bubbling water.

Alanis planted his feet, ready to stab into the beast, but slipped. I saw why he did and my guilt became paramount. Alanis swiped at the objects that caused him to skid and wore a confused look. Did the Norsemen really think he slipped on the shells of huge eggs or the sucked clean skulls of bastard Norse children? If he realized the true horror of our sacrifice to the son of the sea, he never said it. He kicked and stabbed, trying to fight the beast.

The long limbs of the creature slapped Alanis and flipped him over. His gaze was wide but he did not shout in horror or fear. Kendrick crawled away from the hole and fumbled in his vestment for a knife. His eyes locked on the pool as the water suddenly grew still.

With the suddenness of a lightning strike, the green water erupted in a thick plume towards the ceiling and a roar from some primal hell echoed into our ears. Their giant Norse companion burst from the pool like a shot, water streaking from his massive outstretched limbs. With a super human leap, Erik Bedlam was behind the beast and grappling with it. His right arm curled about the monster's neck and his left arm swung down his great battle-axe. The giant blade planted itself deep in the extended arm of the son of the sea with a wet thud.

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Alanis took his chance, jumped to his feet, and raised his sword like a spear. He snarled like a mad beast himself, lunged forward, and drove his blade into the chest of the monster. In his other hand, he pulled a long dirk from his belt and drove it into the side of the creature, then leapt onto the roaring creature along with Bedlam.

Erik released the battle-axe and it fell off, tumbling on the wooden floor. The giant Norseman took both arms to the beast's neck and wrenched. The creature swung hard, and would have dislodged any normal human. Bedlam rode the son of sea like a stallion, trying to break the neck.

Alanis drew his sword out of the creature, readying it for another strike, but lost his grip and fell into the water. He vanished beneath the beasts' thrashing. Kendrick stood, one arm drooping limp like a rag, and armed up the heavy axe of Bedlam. With a side-ways swipe, the older man flung the axe and the blade lodged in the humanoid chest of the beast. Alanis surfaced, gasping for air, but quickly started to hack at the long wet ebon tail with a bloodlust unseen.

"Break, damn you!" Erik cursed, still trying to get the monster's neck to snap. His own muscles strained and his teeth clenched white beneath his wild beard. Veins like tree roots bulged from arm and neck. All of his brawn could not accomplish the task, however.

Kendrick scrambled, and armed up one of the small benches. Awkwardly, he started to fling these into the pool to confuse the beast at the very least.

Alanis was climbing out of the pool when the creature dislodged Bedlam at last. The colossal warrior flew over the wooden planks that used to be the Christian altar and shattered the shelves there. His bulk disappeared from sight as Alanis got to his knees, drew back his sword, and prepared to strike again.

With a skull-splitting shriek, the son of the sea submerged and all was silent. We all looked to the other, unsure of the haunting stillness. The respite was short, for the creature broke the surface again and howled in anger. Unflinching, Alanis resumed his attack, and slashed, carving a wedge in the tail of the hideous monster.

The voice of Bedlam called out, tinged with a humorous tone to say, "He cannot escape back to the sea. I caved in his escape route!" Then the

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insane fighter leapt into view, but his weapon was a strange one. Alanis read the bizarre man's mind and jumped onto the beast's waist. Kendrick grabbed at the swinging arm of the beast, making the claws stick into one of the prayer benches.

Bedlam jumped over me and gripped his weapon...the rusted, defiled cross that our blacksmith made when I was a boy. Long had I prayed to it and so easily, it was taken down and urinated on by us to appease the sons of the sea. Now, the cross was a weapon used to bury itself in the skull of the creature. There was a hollow echo as Bedlam cracked the skull of the beast. He jumped onto the body and thrashed at its head, over and over with the cross. Great thick torrents of dark ichor splattered about the room with each wallop of the holy weapon until, finding death, the fiend collapsed.

"But he is immortal," I sobbed, watching a creature I thought to be a god perish.

Erik grinned and told me, "Perhaps it could live forever, but could die if it met the exact providence." The Norsemen all stood by the pool and stared at the dead creature. Erik then faced Kendrick and suddenly seized his arm and shoulder. With one motion, he popped the wizard's arm back into joint.

"It will suffice," Kendrick thanked Erik, appearing to be in agony as he rubbed his shoulder.

The following horrors are almost too vile to recall.

They burned the church. They turned the defiled house of god into a giant pyre. Erik taunted me that I turned on my peaceful God Jesus so easily. I vomited profusely as that awful giant Viking berserker stabbed into the flames...and cut himself off a section of the roasting meat of the great one ... of the son of the father roaming free ... *and ate him!*

That filthy maniac ate my god! He laughed at my fear and revulsion. The old one joined him but Alanis did not. The blonde warrior wore a troubled look over it all. He seemed suddenly deep in brooding. When Kendrick offered me some of the roasted flesh, I never thought I would cease purging myself. I rent my clothes, falling to the floor, and wept.

Bedlam joked over me and Alanis, deep disgust in his voice, asked Kendrick, "Doesn't he ever stop crying?"

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The giant teased the fire with his broken claymore and proclaimed, "We are through with this defiled man and his rotten town. I will leave you with a symbol of true power, of a real god to forever remind you of your deliverance." Bedlam turned from the fire with the sword. The broken jagged tip of the blade was red hot and glowing. The berserker stepped on my belly, and then stood astraddle of me, feet on my arms. That evil man carved what is on my heart to this day...a crude "T", the hammer of Thor, emblem of his pagan god.

That is how they left me. It is by a miracle I found my way here and to the Abbey in Ely. Many here think my story a delusion or the product of an unhinged mind. My fears grew paramount again when I heard the foolish plans of people to repopulate Dunwich! Let us hope the fire of the three travelers wiped the horrors away and the shade of the chaos from below will never haunt there again. I must see to my own soul. Hiding in the cloister is not enough. I must show God that I am repentant.

With this my acknowledgment of a mad occasion, I hope to cleanse from my life the terror of Dunwich. With the white hot irons of the blacksmith here in the monastery, I will expunge this pagan icon from my heart—adding a bar and transforming it into the cross of Christ. The pain I will tolerate will be an excellent gratification, for truly Jesus can only protect my heart now. It was he who brought these wanderers to Dunwich and removed this blight from the Earth.

I know not what became of Alanis, Erik, and Kendrick, but I am sure divine providence will guide them to their destiny.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Dunwich in England dates from Roman times when it was said to be the largest town in East Anglia. Some claim that Christianity first made its way to the British Isles through Dunwich with the arrival of St Felix of Burgandy in AD 632. He crowned the Saxon Sigebert as King of East Anglia. Sigebert built his palace at Dunwich. Dunwich reached its peak in the 13th century when it boasted 18 churches and monasteries plus eighty sea going vessels. Its demise started in 1328 when a storm saw four hundred homes and three churches lost to the sea and the port blocked by silting. Since then the town has slowly been eroded by the sea, with the market place going in the 17th century. Today*

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there are no more than one hundred homes, one church, a pub and a museum, which documents the town's history from Roman times to the present day. The monastery in Ely is a real place. This monastery was destroyed by the Danes in 870, but restored in 970.

THE END

Steven L. Shrewsbury, 36, is the author over 325 published tales online or in print. His fourth novel, *Godforsaken* will soon be released by Behler Publications. His third book, *Bulletproof Soul*, was released from Black Death Books in '04. His other novels out are *Nocturnal Vacations* ('02) and *Depths Of Savagery* e-Book (03). His current projects are *King Of The Bastards* with Brian Keene and *Bedlam Unleashed* with Peter Welmerink. His tales have appeared in print magazines like *Adventurous*, *Cyber-Pulp*, *Eldritch Tales*, *Dark Wisdom*, & *Mystery Buff*. Over a hundred of his poems are in magazines like *Penny Dreadful*, and *Deathrealm*.

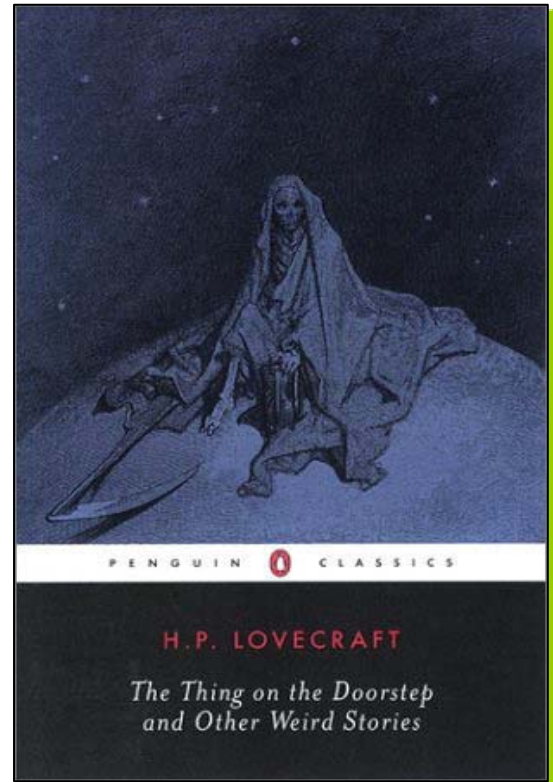
Peter J. Welmerink, 39, can be found both online and in print. Besides being the co-creator and publisher of *Petrus Comics*, a short-lived but successful 11-issue illustrated superhero and fantasy "comic book" that showcased various writers and authors in the 1990's, his fiction has appeared in other print publications such as *Dan Rivers Anthology*, *Display Magazine* and *Amazing Journeys Magazine*. He has appeared in several online e-zines such as *Swords Edge*, *The Murder Hole*, *Astropoetica* and *The Quantum Barbarian Magazine*. He won 1st place for Best Fan Fiction at Dragonlance.com with a tale entitled *Stranger Of The Lance*. His short story *Race Into Blood* was chosen as part of *Best Of Swords Edge 2002*. Forthcoming heroic fantasy tales will be appearing in *In The Outposts Of Beyond* and *Kings Of The Night II*. He has two websites that support his work and others at www.highfantasy.iwarp.com and www.highadventure.iwarp.com

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I've always had a love-hate relationship with Lovecraft. I really enjoyed his "Dexter Ward" novella, but some of the other stuff is too vague or too purple for my tastes. But, of course, it all depends on the context and the reading situation, sometimes. For example, I read *At the Mountains of Madness* while on the beach in the middle of a sunny day. In that context, it doesn't go over too well. The worst part of "Madness" for me? From an ornithological standpoint, the killer giant penguins were a bit over the top. I started laughing when I reached that part. Still, I remember my childhood reading of Lovecraft with some fondness, and so when it came time to contribute to the new anthology *Scattered, Smothered, Covered*, edited by Jason Erik Lundberg, (more on that here: www.jasonlundberg.net/twocranes//scs.html)

I collaborated with M.F. Korn and D.F. Lewis to create "The Strange Case of the Lovecraft Cafe," which includes a partial menu from the Lovecraft Cafe (naturally). One item from the menu is the aforementioned penguin: "Flaming Whole Giant Penguin—Served flaming in its entirety, from beak to excavated bowels (filled with smaller fowl such as whole marinated quail, owls, and dwarf eagles), and recently retrieved for your eating pleasure from the Mountains of Madness, the bird is first plucked, the feathers replaced in a more aesthetically pleasing pattern. A delightful concoction of fat, pounded ham, offal, spices, prunes, dried sour cherries, cheese, and eggs is injected under the fat layer. The whole is then alternately slow-roasted on a spit and placed on mounds of melting ice to preserve the glacial allure of the living bird. Note: We require three days' advance notice to capture and prepare this dish for you."



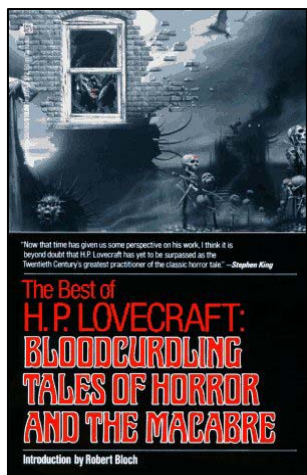
■ Jeff VanderMeer
<http://www.jeffvandermeer.com>

(I wanted to write that) my favorite Lovecraft story is "The Music of Erich Zann." I think it's the best story ever written on the perils of artistic creation!

■ Theodora Goss

H.P. Lovecraft Related Websites

- <http://www.hplovecraft.com/>
- <http://www.dagonbytes.com/thelibrary/lovecraft/>
- <http://www.templeofdagon.com/index.htm>
- <http://alangullette.com/lit/hpl/>
- <http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/lovecraft.html>
- <http://www.cthulhulives.org/toc.html>
- <http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/superhor.htm>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lovecraft>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cthulhu_Mythos
- http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/184_lovecraft1.shtml
- <http://www.shoggoth.net/index.php3?topic=H.P.+Lovecraft§ion=Home>



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Poetry: Thomas Zimmerman

Eldritch Moonlight

He'd kissed his way on up his girlfriend's thigh,
and then an ancient, eldritch moonlight shone
with darkness double what he'd called his own.
He bolted blindly from the bed—the sky

had fallen like a pall, a starless sty
of night that mired the Earth. He heard the groan
of other newly blinded humans prone
on darkened floors and sheets, afraid to die.

Malignant, mad, a cosmic horror fell
from far beyond the stars or oozed from deep
within Earth's crust—not solid, but a stream

or wraith-like sheath of terror worse than Hell
that scared the man, but thrilled the girl: she'd keep
this newfound power; he'd just learn to scream.

Lovecraftian Tune

The nighttime jumped me from behind
and suckled me upon the moon;
you wonder how I lost my mind:
I barbecued your cat in June.

This sickness slid from sharpened stars
that drove their daggers in my soul;
eclipses are my avatars,
the klieg lights for my Grand Guignol.

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So now we chant upon this hill
where wizards conjured snakes from rods:
I touch your breasts; your scream's so shrill,
it wakes the evil elder gods:

their message scrawled across the sky
is, "Virgin priestess, you must die."

Magna Mater

A goat-man pipes, wild
and blind, and Magna Mater—
gowned in asphodels,

nails lacquered black, lips
poppy-hued and full, feet sunk
ankle-deep in muck

of dung and rat-gnawed
skulls—beckons me. This darkling
chasm's as vast as

the womb of the world
would be, but we're under the
world; the wan light glows

blood-brown. I've fallen
here. Tasting salt, I realize
now I'm crying, so

I wipe my tears—my
cheeks fall off! I rub my hands—
the palms shred to wet

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gray lace! The bones poke
through! I scream—a vocal cord
strains, frays, and snaps! The

goat-man blows—wilder,
blind. Magna Mater smiles, bares
her breasts—they lactate

gall; baby serpents
slide in Möbius strips around
and between them. A

forked tongue flickers from
her lips. Age-old, infantile,
I crawl to her, bawl.

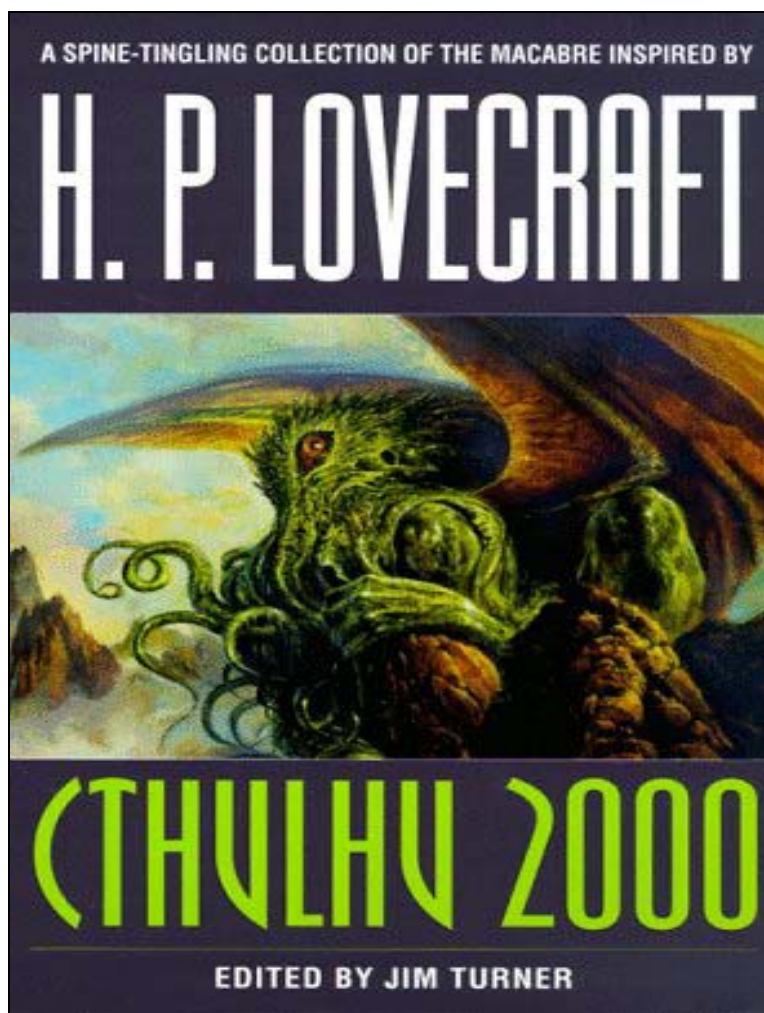
Thomas Zimmerman teaches English at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, MI. Poems of his have appeared recently in *Quietus* and *Simulacrum*.

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I put on my purple prose overwritten Baroque phraseology reading gear when I go back to reading Lovecraft. I've written a few HPL imitation stories. I've taken a page from his collection of correspondence by amassing my own twelve volumes of epistolary discourse to go along with my Body of Work (for good or ill). Just as it is always fun to go back to Poe, the same with HPL. But it is essential when writing a modern horror novel that I abandon pulpdrom, so I know when to come up from the moon pool of his prose and leave it alone for another time. Besides, I'm not great at imitating HPL's prose anyway. A village voice journalist years ago called HPL's prose 'ravings'. The little old lady societies in Providence frown at the mention of his name. But I will always consider HPL the literary heir from Poe."

■ M.F. Korn

http://www.geocities.com/rachmaninoff_70815/



As well as informing my prose and imagination from an impressionable age (and now at the age of 57 I can't really separate the influence from the influenced), HPL has imbued me with the sense of the Amateur: his own work being scattered through a bewildering array of crazy outlets during his lifetime. I am now boldly and boldly auditing (by means of the Internet) my own Amateur fiction after many years of such a splatter extravaganza. Equally, I organize the magazine I publish as, hopefully, a Gentleman and an Amateur would! HPL, however, whatever his faults, is where one must end because that's where true cosmic story telling began.

■ D.F. Lewis

<http://www.weirdmonger.com>

Author Interview

Poppy Z. Brite

Poppy Z. Brite is the author of seven novels, three collections of short stories, and much miscellanea. Early in her career she was known for her horror fiction, but at present she is working on a series of novels and short stories set in the New Orleans restaurant world. Her novel *Liquor* was recently published by Three Rivers Press to general critical acclaim, and her follow-up, *Prime*, will be released in 2005. She lives in New Orleans with her husband Chris, a chef. See more about her at <http://www.poppyzbrite.com>

What is New Orleans Literature? Does it truly exist?

I don't think it does—I think there's a huge, diverse group of writers working here, and that has been the case for at least 150 years, but I don't see any real cohesiveness to it. My own favorite piece of New Orleans literature (small L), and the only piece I can really claim as an influence, is John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy Of Dunces*. It's probably the best piece of fiction ever written about the city, and certainly the truest. I doubt I'll ever live up to it, but that sort of honesty is what I'm currently striving for in writing about New Orleans, rather than the sort of decadent-fantasy version of my earlier work.

Tell us about the new book, *Liquor*. When did the idea behind the story merge into the next book you would write?

Well, the NEW new book is actually *Prime*, which may be out by the time this is published (it's a March '05 release). *Liquor* is the first story I wrote set in the New Orleans restaurant world, about a pair of young cooks who are disgusted with their series of dead-end jobs and come up with what I think would be a brilliant idea for New Orleans: a restaurant where all the dishes include liquor of some sort. When I started the novel, I was writing it almost completely for fun (a feeling I'd come perilously close to forgetting after a decade in the business) and figured it would be a one-off.

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After finishing it, though, I realized I'd enjoyed the characters and their world too much to let go. I wrote a short novel, *The Value Of X*, about their early years and cooking background, and then I wrote a few short stories about them and their families, and about that time *Liquor* was bought by Crown. When they found out I had an idea for another novel, they gave me a two-book contract. PRIME was the second book in that contract, and I've just signed a deal to write two more about the same characters. I'm as surprised as anyone that this has turned into a huge series, but it also makes me feel more excited about writing than I'd felt in many, many years before I began *Liquor* in late 2000.

There seems to be a peculiar yet distinct relationship between food, sex and death in your work—one that goes beyond the simple eat-live-death circle. Care to elaborate on that?

I'm actually very much opposed to that whole conceit, particularly the food-sex bit. I'm tired of fiction that jams food together with what I consider to be a wholly different sort of desire. Of course food and dining can be incredibly sensual, but isn't it interesting enough on its own? Why do we have to link everything with our genitalia? My characters cook and eat, and sometimes they have sex and sometimes they die (though I find that I concentrate on both these things a good deal less than I used to), but I don't see that I make any particular relationship between the three things.

Why the sudden break away from the so-called Goth literature genre? Have you entered a more ... light (not necessarily in the illuminative meaning of the word) period in your writing?

I never considered myself to be part of any Goth literature genre. When I was a part of/interested in the Goth scene, I wrote about characters who were Goths. Now it's not a particular interest of mine, so I don't. I'm pleased to still have Goth fans and don't intend to come off as reactionary about it, but I don't know the current bands, fashions, etc, and if I did try to write about it, I'm sure it would ring old-codgery and false.

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Do you prefer to write, as you very often do, from a male perspective, or do the characters just come to you that way?

I write from my own perspective, which I do consider to be a male one. I feel that I've done a somewhat better job of writing about female characters in recent years—particularly in a couple of short stories about the Stubbs girls—but it is still very difficult and I doubt it will ever come naturally to me.

What's been happening on the Rickey and G-Man front? Any new developments?

As I say, I've signed a deal with Crown for two more novels. I've just begun the first of those novels, which is tentatively titled *Soul Kitchen*.

What's nice about cemeteries? People find it terribly clichéd that (for lack of a better word) Horror writers like them. But I know there are people out there who are not writers, of any kind, that find them appealing.

For myself, I like the architecture and the history. In New Orleans in particular, you can learn a lot about the city from spending time in the older cemeteries. Not only the families; some of the tombs have plaques saying who did the stonework and where their businesses were located. Things like that. I don't hang aimlessly around in them or have sex in them as I did when I was a daft Goth, but they're still beautiful and interesting.

If H.P. Lovecraft were alive today, what would he be writing?

I have no idea. Probably not the garbage you tend to see from most of the people who claim to be "the next Lovecraft."

Would you like to write another biography some day?

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No, I wouldn't. I liked being able to finance a few years of travel and short-story writing with that project, but I didn't enjoy the project itself, and I don't enjoy writing nonfiction in general (though I do love reading it).

Tell us something about Poppy Z. Brite no one else knows. Preferably not even your mother.

Er, if the people who love me best don't know it, why would I tell a magazine?

Sexuality is another important element in your work. Gay male characters feature extensively in your work. Is it easier for you to write from certain sexual perspectives than others? What do you feel does the aspect of sex and sensuality bring to your work?

There's a pivotal scene in *Lost Souls*, but we don't see a lot of it "onscreen" and, anyway, that was a dozen years ago. Gay characters and sex, certainly, but though I still write about gay characters, a lot of the eroticism (should I say voyeurism?) seems to have left my work. I got to talking about this in my Livejournal one time, and here's what I came up with:

"These characters, Rickey and G-man, seem to value their relationship more than any others I've written about. The relationship is not a brand-new source of wonder and passion for them; it's life as they know it, which is a whole different ball game (again, so to speak). They're comfortable in it; they're honest about it; they know what it is, and it's not a source of angst for them. They tolerate my flashing the reader a glimpse of their sex life when the story seems to require it, as in my short story "Bayou de la Mère," but they're not about to let me splash it gratuitously all over the page to titillate myself or anyone else. I respect that, and as far as possible, I do what they tell me; I'd certainly be lost without them at this point."

Have you ever experienced any negative feedback from the gay

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community with regards to some of the characters in your work?

Not that I'm aware of.

What are you currently reading?

Bad Bet On The Bayou: The Rise & Fall Of Gambling In Louisiana And The Fall Of Governor Edwin Edwards by Tyler Bridges. Research.

What are the current soundtracks to your life?

I don't listen to nearly as much music as I used to, and it certainly doesn't have the impact on my work that it once did. I like West Coast rap, I like some New Orleans stuff, I like the Beatles and Tom Waits, but I really only listen to music in the car—never while writing any more.

Which of your books\stories would you like to see translated to the screen the most? Any such negotiations in the works, perhaps?

I don't care about seeing any of them made into movies. I don't think I would turn down a decent offer by someone who seemed to care about the work, but I never see movies and the art form isn't one that appeals to me.

Do you believe in reincarnation?

Sorta-kinda. Some days more than others. I don't believe myself to be the second coming of Joe Orton or anything.

Have you ever received any curious requests from fans via emails, letters or at book signings?

Mostly they're very nice and just want a signed book or a nice note. One thing I don't understand is the people who ask me to collaborate with

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them. How could I collaborate with somebody I didn't know, and why would I want to?

If you were a book, where would you be and who would have written you?

I hope I'd have written myself.

What's next for Poppy, career wise?

I'll spend the next couple of years writing the two Liquor novels I've just contracted for. If I write any non-Stubbs-family short stories, they'll probably be about my character Dr. Brite, the coroner of New Orleans. One thing possibly of interest to your readers is that I'll be a guest at Continuum 3 in Melbourne (www.continuum.org.au/) in July '05.

I have to ask: What would you like your epitaph to read?

I doubt I'll have one. My family isn't big on funerals or, generally, resting places.

THE END

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More news and information about Poppy Z. Brite can be found at:
www.poppyzbrite.com

Featured Artist

Dave Carson

Vital Stats

Age: 49

Country: Born in Ireland, Lives in England

Training: Self-taught

Medium: Digital, Pen & Ink, Sculpture

Influences: H.P.Lovecraft, M.R. James, Arthur Machen, Clark Ashton Smith, Italian horror movies, Mars Attacks! bubblegum cards, Weird Tales magazine, monster movies, 60's underground art, Ancient Evil.



On The Web:

<http://davecarson.topcities.com/> &
<http://www.cafepress.com/carsonthings>

How long have you been working as a professional illustrator?

My first paying illustration job was around 1980. That was artwork for a small advertisement for G.Ken Chapman, a London bookseller who was the main importer of Arkham House books in England back then.

Which artists have influenced\inspired you the most?

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The pulp artists Virgil Finlay and Lee Brown Coye were my main influences. I was very impressed by Finlay's superb stipple technique, and Coye's moldy, leprous and bizarre figures just amazed me. Others would include Martin Sharp, Harry Clarke, Aubrey Beardsley.

Tell us about your creative process—where do you find inspiration and ideas for a new drawing?

I wish I knew. *Things* just pop into my head. I've had a lifetime of horror influences to draw upon, so I don't find it too difficult to come up with something nasty. It's almost automatic now, the trouble I have is when I'm called upon to draw normal things ...

Tell us a bit about how you came to illustrate for the Fighting Fantasy role-playing series. Was it an enjoyable venture?

I sent some samples along to Puffin Books and they got back to say that they liked my stuff. I'm afraid that I can't remember the name of the lady who was handling the artwork at Puffin then, but she was a very nice person and it was very easy working with her. The author of the book that I illustrated, *Beneath Nightmare Castle*, Peter Darvill-Evans, was very friendly and helpful too. I did enjoy it at the time, but I doubt if I'd do it again. Terrible lot of work involved... and I'm basically a lazy bugger.



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What is it about Lovecraft's work in particular that appeals to your artistic sensibilities?

It's undoubtedly the huge scope an illustrator has with his material. How I've become so attached to things eldritch and Lovecraftian over the years is down to my personality I guess.

Will someone somewhere, some day, make a decent movie based on one of Lovecraft's stories? What would your personal, perfect vision of this be?

I thought Stuart Gordon's *Dagon* was a pretty fine attempt. Although it's not based on an H.P.L story, Guillermo Del Toro's *Hellboy* is magnificently Lovecraftian, it's my favorite movie of the past decade without doubt. I'd love to see my favorite Lovecraft story *The Call Of Cthulhu* done properly.



Do you prefer working in traditional mediums like oils as opposed to computer art?

Lately I find I prefer to work digitally.

How would you describe your work—thematically, and in terms of style?

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Brian Lumley once described it as "Leprous Tentacularity"—I'll stick with that.

Do you have any interesting projects in the pipeline you'd like to tell us about?



I may be working on another book with Stephen Jones. We did *H.P. Lovecraft's Book Of Horror* together a few years ago and it went down pretty well. I'm also working with *Dark Wisdom* (www.darkwisdom.com/) on a couple of things.

What are some of the work in your portfolio that you are most proud of?

I'd have to say the *Haunters Of The Dark* portfolio, which Carl Ford (Editor of DAGON) published way back in 1987. I'm pretty pleased with some of my stuff in the *Shadows Over Innsmouth* book too, particularly the Mother Hydra illustration.

Five things every aspiring artist must know:

1. You will get ripped off.
2. Try not to get ripped off.
3. Do not rip off anyone else.
4. Get paid in advance, if possible.
5. Don't take yourself too seriously.

Parting shot: Go see *Hellboy*.

THE END

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Featured Editor Interview

Mike Miller - Surreal Magazine

Mike (M.G.) Miller is the Fiction Editor for Surreal Magazine, published by Cavern Press (www.cavernpress.com), as well as the Editor for the press' Surreal Imprint. His literary novel, *Bayou Jesus*, will be available from Cavern in 2005; also forthcoming is Miller's *Her Grave Embrace*, a novel of voodoo, revenge ... and undying love.

What made you start up *Surreal Magazine*? Is it something you have always wanted to do?

Surreal is published by Cavern Press, my publisher for *Bayou Jesus* and *Her Grave Embrace*. Knowing my passion for the horror genre, they approached me to be the Surreal Editor. I signed on that afternoon.

What type of stories don't you see enough of? (On the flipside—which ones do you see more than enough of?)

I don't think there's any one type of story that I don't see enough of, from possessed plumbing to zombie cowboys. As long as a story has a strong hook, an engaging voice and unique style, and is solid and compelling enough for me to reach the end, I'm rooting for it.

The flipside is this: too much telling and not enough showing. I see too many stories that read more like stage direction rather than immersing me in the experience

When you're looking at submissions for the magazine, in what way does the U.S. genre market compare to its British counterpart?

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Comparably, they're both producing solid horror across the spectrum. Contrasting may be easier, in that from a year's worth of Surreal submissions, it seems that the majority of our British writers have focused more on the psychological, whereas our U.S. writers focused more on action. I like both.

How do you think the Horror genre has changed in the last fifteen to twenty years? How has the media (mainly film and television) changed the reading public's perception of what 'Horror' is supposed to be?

I think it's changed for the better. I'm seeing more fusing of horror with other genres than I did twenty years ago. Still a lot of dark fantasy and sci-fi, but also more comedy, western and even romance. This is good because it means people are reading around, not limiting themselves, and are therefore being more creative and taking chances.

About film and television, frankly, I think they have some catching up to do. As horror readers, I believe that while we can enjoy both, we've come to expect different things of them, and that the avid horror reader isn't swayed by the movies' mainstream (promotional-dollar) sensibilities. With the emergence of more independent publishers over the last twenty years, producing material too hardcore for the mainstream, what's available to us now can take us places we've never dreamed, and where no movie ever could.

When and how did your interest in horror literature emerge? What about the genre was, for you, an immediate attraction?

I can't remember a time when I wasn't fascinated with horror. I was drawing it before I could read it. Like many, I started reading Poe at a very young age. For me, horror has always been about the lure of the unknown and the feeling it produces in me of being very much alive. I'm an adrenaline junkie, I love to be scared.

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What is the most surreal thing that has ever happened to you?

Surreal. Seriously.

If H.P. Lovecraft was alive in the 21st Century, what do you think he'd be writing about?

I think he would still be pushing horror's envelope. Yes, that was an evasive answer, but in these modern times of everyday horrors, there's really just no telling.

If ever they made a (decent) movie based on one of Lovecraft's stories, which do you think would translate best to the screen? (And who'd end up being sacrificed to Cthulhu?)

I'd like to see a decent remake of *The Dunwich Horror*. And could we sacrifice Paris Hilton?

What do you enjoy about the short story format?

That an economy of words can sometimes have such a profound effect.

Who are some of your current favorite short story writers?

Gerard Houarner, Jack Ketchum, Michael Laimo, Tim Lebbon, Edward Lee, Joyce Carol Oates, Monica J. O'Rourke

What makes a good editor? What is at the core of editing for you, and how do you view your role in the process of a writer submitting a story until it finally appears on paper?

A good editor is invisible, someone who can make a good book even better by smoothing the rough edges without tampering with an author's voice. And this is what's at the core of editing for me: not to intrude on the story, but to refine it.

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My role is discernment; a good story is one that should demand the least amount of my time. For the serious writer, one who follows our guidelines and takes the time to run a spell check, the process from submission to print should consist mainly of the waiting game.

What are your editorial peeves?

Easy. Writers who obviously don't read our guidelines.

Has online publishing had a positive or negative influence on the publishing industry in general? Some would say that it has significantly lowered the standards of fiction readers.

I don't agree with online publishing lowering readers' standards. Standards are subjective. As readers, it provides more choices; as writers, it provides more opportunity.

I would think that online publishing could only benefit the industry in general by making work available to traditional publishers they might otherwise never see.

What, in your opinion, were the five most influential Horror (for lack of a better umbrella term) books of 2004?

Fears Unnamed by Tim Lebbon, *In Silent Graves* by Gary Braunbeck, *Madman Stan & Other Stories* by Richard Laymon, *Deep in the Darkness* by Michael Laimo and *Off Season: Unexpurgated* (Overlook Connection trade edition) by Jack Ketchum. *Off Season* will always be influential.

What would you like your epitaph to read?

He rests. He has traveled. —James Joyce, *Ulysses*

THE END

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Simulacrum Submission Guidelines

Lynne Jamneck, Editor – Contact: 68 O'Hara Street, Invercargill, New Zealand

Email: simulacrum@specficworld.com

- Needs: Fiction\Poetry\Artwork—most speculative genres (H/F/SF/MR). (Quiet, gothic horror as opposed to gore and violence.)
- Will look at articles, reviews and interviews on request.
- Pays in copies and one-year subscription to the magazine. Format—pdf.
- Fiction—between 1000 and 8000 words.

Aim of the magazine is to expose new talent in writing and artwork alongside established writers. No fan fiction. Professionally formatted manuscripts only, please.

Established and new artists\writers welcome. Prefers snail mail subs, although email subs will be accepted in MS Word .doc/rtf. file format. 1.5 Line Spacing. Please scan attachments for viruses before sending. For further information, please contact me at the email address above.